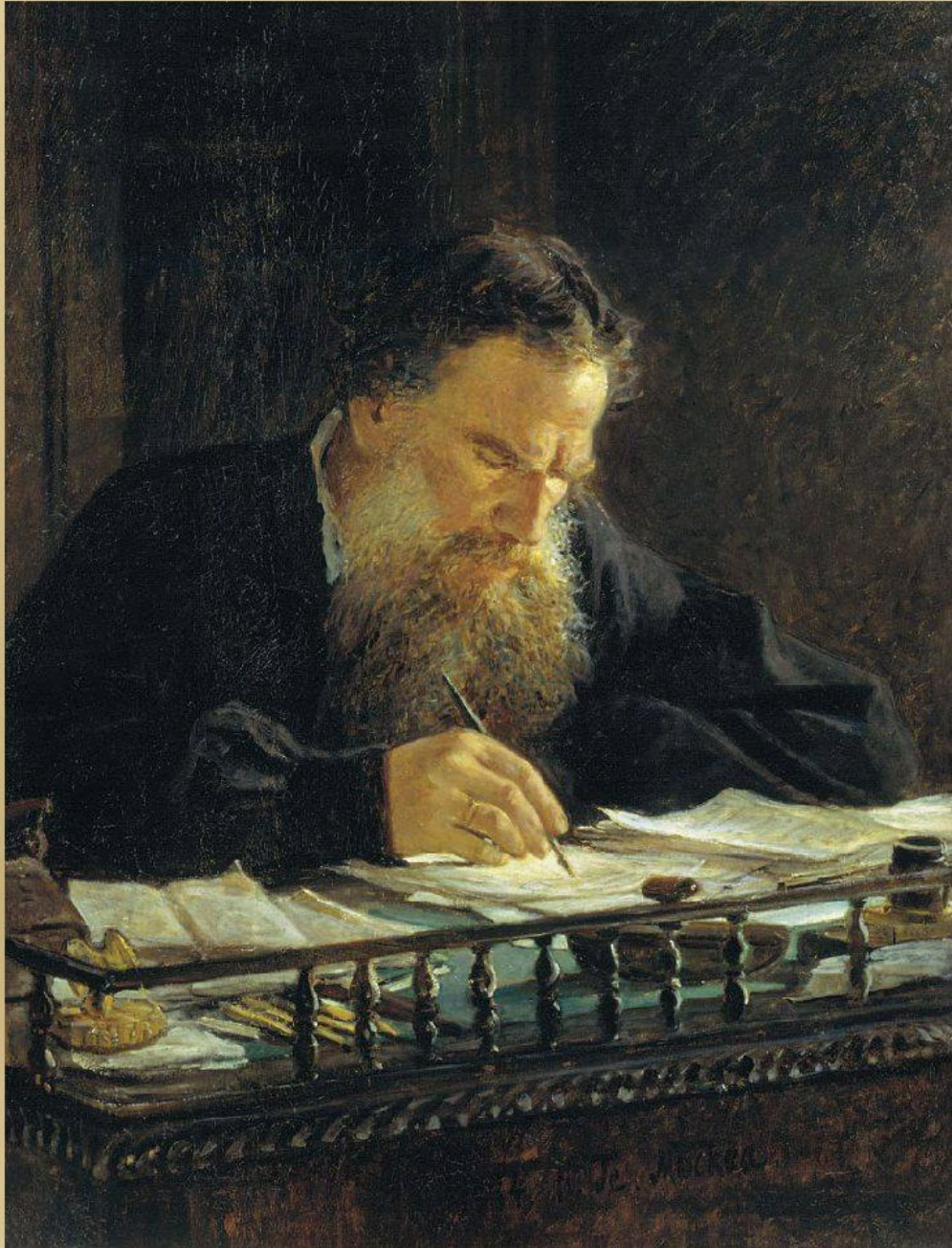


# **My Religion - What I Believe**



**Lev Tolstoy**

## My Religion – What I Believe by Lev Tolstoy

### Introduction

I am fifty-five years old and, with the exception of the fourteen or fifteen years of my childhood, I have been until recently a “Nihilist” in the proper signification of that term, i.e. I have not been a Socialist or Revolutionist, but a Nihilist in the sense of being completely without faith.

Five years ago I began to believe in the teaching of Christ, and in consequence a great change has been wrought in me. I now no longer care for the things that I had prized, and I have begun to desire that which I had formerly been indifferent to. The causes which seemed worthy of respect to me before, now appeared unworthy, and what seemed bad before appeared to be good now. Like a man who, going out on business, on his way suddenly becomes convinced of the futility of that business and turns back; and all that stood to the right now stands to the left, and all that was to the left is now to the right; his wish to be as far from home as possible is changed to the desire of being as near home as possible – so, I may say, the whole aim and purpose of my life has been changed; my desires are no more what they have been. For me, good and evil have changed places. This experience came through my apprehending the teaching of Christ in an altogether different way compared to how I understood it earlier.

It is not my intention to interpret the teaching of Christ, but simply to relate how I came to understand the simplest, clearest, intelligible, the most undoubtful, and addressing all people meaning in the teaching; and how that, which I had grasped, gave a new direction to all my thoughts, and provided me with peacefulness and happiness.

I have no wish to interpret the teaching of Christ, but I should like to prevent others from interpreting it wrongly. Christian churches generally acknowledge that all men, however they may differ from each other in knowledge or mental capacity, are equal before God; and that the truth revealed to man is accessible to all. Christ Himself has told us that the Father has hidden some things ‘from the wise and prudent, and revealed them to the unaware.’

All men cannot be initiated into the mysteries of dogmatic, homiletic, and

patristic theologies, and so on, but everybody can understand what Christ taught to all millions of simple and ignorant men. This is what Christ told all these simple people, who didn't have an opportunity to get explanations of his teaching from Paul, Clement, Zlatoust and others; his meaning was incomprehensible to me, too, but I understand it now, and that's what I want to explain to all people.

The thief on the cross believed in Christ and was saved. Would it have harmed anybody if the thief had not died on the cross, but had come down to tell us how he believed in Christ?

Like the thief on the cross, I, too, believed in the teaching of Christ, and found my salvation in it. This is not a far-fetched comparison; it is the closest description of the condition of anguish and despair I was once in at the thought of life and of death, and it also indicates the peace and happiness that now fill my soul.

Like the thief, I knew that my life was full of wickedness; I saw that the greater part of those around me were morally no better than I was. Like the thief, too, I knew that I was unhappy, and that I suffered; and that all around me were unhappy and suffering likewise, and I saw no way out of this state of misery but through death.

Like the thief, I was nailed, as it were by some invisible power, to this life of suffering and evil; and the same dreadful darkness of death that awaited the thief, after his useless suffering and enduring of the evils of life, awaited me.

In all this I was like the thief, but there was this difference between us: he was dying, and I still lived. The thief could believe that his salvation would be realized beyond the grave, but I could not; because, putting aside the life beyond the grave, I had yet to live on earth. I did not, however, understand life. It seemed awful to me until I heard the words of Christ and understood them; and then life and death no longer seemed to be evils; instead of despair I felt the joy of possessing a life that death has no power to destroy.

Can it harm anyone if I relate how it was that this change was effected in me?

## Chapter 1

I have explained the reason why I had not properly understood the teaching of Christ in my two works, *A Criticism on Dogmatic Theology* and *A New Translation and Comparison of the Four Gospels*, with a commentary. In these works I examine all that conceals the truth from the eyes of men, and also retranslate and compare the four gospels verse by verse.

I have been engaged for some six years upon this work. Every year, every month, I find new clarifications and confirmations of the main thought, and I correct the defects that creep in through haste or impulse. My life will perhaps end before the work is complete, but I am sure that it is a much needed work, and therefore I shall do what I can while my life lasts.

This is my outward work on the theology of the gospel. But the inner working of my soul, which I wish to speak of here, was not the result of a methodical investigation of doctrinal theology, or of the actual texts of the gospel; it was a sudden removal of all that hid the true meaning of the Christian teaching – a momentary flash of light, which made everything clear to me. It was something like that which might happen to a man who, after vainly attempting, by a false plan, to build up a statue out of a confused heap of small pieces of marble, suddenly guesses at the figure they are intended to form by the shape of the largest piece; and then, on beginning to set up the statue, finds his guess confirmed by the harmonious joining in of the various pieces.

I wish to tell in this work how I found the key to the teaching of Christ, by the help of which the truth was disclosed to me so clearly and convincingly.

Here is how I made the discovery. Almost from the first years of my childhood, when I began to read the gospel for myself, the teaching that professes love, humility, meekness, self-denial, and returning good for evil was the teaching that touched me most. I always considered it as the basic teaching of Christianity and loved it as such; but it was only after a long period of unbelief that its full meaning flashed upon me, that I understood 'life' as our unlettered working classes understand it, and accepted the same creed that they profess, the creed of the Greek Orthodox Church. But I soon observed that I should not find in the teaching of the Church the

confirmation of my idea that love, humility, meekness, and self-denial were the essential principles of Christianity. I noticed that this dear to me essence of Christianity is not the main point in the teaching of the Church. I saw that what appeared to me the most important in Christianity was not recognized important by the Church. The Church recognizes something else the most important. At first I did not attach much importance to this. 'The Church,' I said to myself, 'acknowledges, besides the teaching of love, humility, and self-denial, a dogmatic and ritualistic teaching. This estranges my heart; it is even repulsive to me, but there is no harm in it.'

While, however, submitting to the teaching of the Church, I began to see more and more clearly that this peculiarity was not as unimportant as I had at first regarded it. I was drawn away from the Church by various singularities in its dogmas; by its approval of persecution, capital punishment, and war; and also by its intolerance of all other forms of worship than its own; but my faith in the teaching of the Church was shaken still more by its indifference to what seemed to me the very basis of the teaching of Christ, and by its evident partiality for what I could not consider an essential part of that teaching. I felt that there was something wrong, but I could not make out distinctly what it was, because the Church did not deny what seemed to me the main point in the teaching of Christ, though it failed to give it its proper position and influence. I could not reprimand the Church for denying the essential, but the way the Church recognized this essential did not satisfy me. The Church did not give me what I expected of it.

I only passed from 'Nihilism' to the Church because I felt I could not live without faith – without a knowledge of what is good and evil, resting on something more than my animal instincts. I hoped to find this knowledge in Christianity. But Christianity, as it appeared to me then, was only a certain disposition of mind – a very vague one. I turned to the Church for obligatory precepts of life, but the Church gave me only such as did not draw me nearer to the Christian state of mind I longed for, but rather alienated me from it. And I could not follow it. I needed and valued life based on the Christian principles; the Church gave me the rules of life alien to the principles that were dear to me. For the precepts that were given to me by the Church concerning belief in dogmas, observance of the sacraments, fast-days, and prayers, I did not care; and precepts really founded on the

teachings of Christ were wanting. Moreover, the precepts of the Church weakened, and sometimes even destroyed, that Christian state of mind that alone seemed to me to be the true aim of life. What perplexed me most of all was that all the evil things that men do, such as condemning private individuals, whole nations, or other religions; and the inevitable results of these condemnations – executions and wars – were justified by the Church. I saw that the teaching of Christ, which teaches us humility, tolerance, forgiveness, self-denial, and love, was verbally extolled by the Church, but that at the same time she sanctioned what was incompatible with such teaching.

Could the teaching of Christ be so weak and inconsistent? That I could not believe. Besides, it had always perplexed me that those parts of the Gospel upon which the Church has picked for her dogmas are of an obscure character, whereas those parts that teach us how to fulfill the teaching in practice are the most definite and clear. While the Church specifies the dogmas and the duties derived from them in the clearest manner, they spoke of the practice of the teaching itself in the most obscure, dim, and mystical expressions. Is it possible that this was what Christ desired for his teaching? I could only find the solution of my doubts in the perusal of the gospels, and I read them over and over again. Of all the gospels, the Sermon on the Mount was the portion that impressed me most, and I studied it more often than any other part. Nowhere else does Christ speak with such solemnity; nowhere else does he give us so many clear and intelligible moral precepts, which commend themselves to everyone; nowhere else does he address to a bigger crowd of simple people of any kind. If there are any clear and definite precepts of Christianity, they must have been expressed in this sermon; and, therefore, in those three chapters of St. Matthew's gospel I sought the solution of my doubts.

Many and many a time I read over the sermon on the Mount, and every time I felt the same emotion: excitement and gratification upon reading the verses about 'turning my cheek to the one who strikes me,' 'giving up my cloak to him who takes my coat,' 'being at peace with all men,' and 'loving my enemies,' – and yet there remained in me the same feeling of dissatisfaction. The words of God, addressed to everyone, were not clear enough. They seemed to enjoin an impossible self-denial that annulled life



itself, as I understood it, and therefore it seemed to me that such self-denial could not be the essential requirement on which man's salvation depended. But, then, if that were not the express condition of salvation, there was nothing else fixed and clear! I not only read the Sermon on the Mount, but the rest of the gospels, and all the Church's commentaries upon them.

The theological explanations tell us that the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount are mere an indication of the perfection after which man must strive; but that man, being full of sin, cannot attain this perfection by his own unaided strength, and that the salvation of a man lies in faith, prayer, and the gifts of the grace of God; but these explanations did not satisfy me.

I could not agree with that, because it always seemed strange to me, why would Christ have given to us such clear and good precepts, addressed directly to each and everyone of us, if he knew beforehand that the keeping of them was impossible by man in his own unaided strength? On reading over these precepts, it always seemed that they applied to me, and that I was morally bound to obey them.

I even felt convinced that I could, immediately and from that very hour, do all that they prescribe. I wished and tried to do so, but as soon as any difficulty arose in the way of my keeping them, I involuntarily remembered the teaching of the Church, that 'man is weak, and can do no good thing by himself,' and then I became weak.

I had been told that it was necessary to believe and to pray, but I felt that my faith was weak and therefore I could not pray. I had been told that it was necessary to pray for faith – that faith comes through prayer and that prayer comes through faith, which, to say the least, was certainly bewildering. But by reason and experience showed me that this means is ineffective. It still seemed to me that effective can be only my efforts to follow the teaching of Christ.

After much useless study of the works that have been written in proof of the divinity or non-divinity of this teaching, and after many doubts and much suffering, I was left alone with the mysterious book, in which the teaching of Christ is taught. I could not give it that meaning that others did, but could not give it another meaning, and I could not abjure the book. It was only

after losing all faith in the explanations of learned theology and criticism, and after dropping all prejudices, as Christ taught 'if you will not receive my teaching as a little child, you will not enter the kingdom of God.' (Mark 10:15), that I began to understand what had until then seemed incomprehensible to me.

It was not by deep thought, or by skillfully comparing or commenting on the texts of the gospel, that I came to understand the teaching. On the contrary, all grew clear to me for the very reason that I had ceased to rest on any interpretations. The text that gave me the key to the truth was the thirty-ninth verse of the fifth chapter of St. Matthew, 'You have heard that it has been said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, do not resist evil...' The simple meaning of these words suddenly flashed full upon me; I accepted the fact that Christ meant exactly what he said; and then, though I had found nothing new, all that had hitherto obscured the truth cleared away, and the truth itself arose before me in all its solemn importance.

I had often read the passage, but these words had never until now arrested my attention: 'I say to you, do not resist evil.' In my conversations since with many Christian people, who know the gospels well, I have observed the same indifference to the force of this text that I had felt. Nobody specially remembered the words; and, while conversing with persons upon the text, I have known them to take up the New Testament in order to assure themselves that the words were really there.

The words, 'Whoever shall strike you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also,' had always presented themselves to me as requiring endurance and self-mastery such as human nature is hardly capable of. They touched me. I felt that to act thus would be to attain moral perfection; but I felt, too, that I should never be able to obey them if they entailed nothing but suffering. I said to myself, 'Well, I will turn my cheek – I will let myself be struck again. I will give up my coat – they shall take my all. They shall even take away my life. Yet, life is given to me. Why should I thus lose it? This cannot be what Christ requires of us.' Then I said to myself, 'Perhaps in these words Christ only purposes to extol suffering and self-denial, and in doing so he speaks exaggeratingly and his expressions are therefore to be



regarded as illustrations rather than precise requirements.' But as soon as I comprehended the meaning of the words, 'do not resist evil,' it became clear to me that Christ does not exaggerate, that he does not require suffering for the mere sake of suffering, and that he only expresses clearly and definitely what he means. He says, 'Do not resist evil,' and if you do not resist evil, you may meet with some who, having struck you on one cheek, and meeting with no resistance, will strike you on the other; after having taken away your coat, will take away your cloak also; having profited by your work, will oblige you to work on; will take, and will never give back. 'Nevertheless, I say to you, do not resist evil. Still do good to those who even strike and abuse you.' Now I understood that the whole force of the teaching lay in the words 'do not resist evil,' and that the entire context was but an application of that great precept. I saw that Christ does not require us to turn the other cheek, and to give away our cloak, in order to make us suffer; but he teaches us not to resist evil, and warns us that doing so may involve personal suffering. Does a father, on seeing his son set out on a long journey, tell him to pass sleepless nights, to eat little, to get wet through, or to freeze? Will he not rather say to him, 'Go, and if on the road you are cold or hungry, do not be discouraged but go on'? Christ does not say 'Let a man strike your cheek, and suffer,' but He says, 'Do not resist evil. Whatever men may do to you, do not resist evil.' These words, 'do not resist evil' (the wicked man), thus apprehended, were the clue that made all clear to me, and I was surprised that I could have hitherto treated them in such a different way. Christ meant to say, 'Whatever men may do to you, bear, suffer, and submit; but never resist evil.' What could be clearer, more intelligible, and more indubitable than this? As soon as I understood the exact meaning of these simple words, all that had appeared confused to me in the teaching of Christ grew intelligible; what had seemed contradictory now became consistent, and what I had deemed superfluous became indispensable. All united in one whole, one part fitting into and supporting the other, like the pieces of a broken statue put together again in their proper places. In the Sermon on the Mount, as well as in all the Gospels, all passages confirmed the same teaching of non-resistance to evil.

In the Sermon on the Mount, as in throughout the Gospels, Christ represents his followers – i.e., those who follow this law of non-resistance – in non

other way than as turning another cheek, giving up the coat and as liable to be persecuted, stoned, and reduced to beggary.

Elsewhere Christ tells that he who does not take up his cross, who is not willing to renounce all, cannot be his student, and he thus describes the man who is ready to bear the consequences that may result from the practice of the teaching of non-resistance. Christ says to his disciples, 'Be poor, be ready to bear persecution, suffering, and even death, without resisting evil.' He prepares for suffering and death himself without resisting evil; he reproves Peter, who grieves over him because Christ proposed to yield in this way; and Christ dies, forbidding others to resist evil, remaining true to his teaching.

All his first disciples obeyed the same law of the non-resistance of evil, and passed their lives in persecution and poverty, and never returned evil for evil.

It means Christ really meant what he told. We may bring forward, as an objection, the difficulty of always obeying such a law; we may even say, as unbelievers do, that it is a foolish teaching, that Christ was a dreamer, an idealist who gave precepts that are impossible to follow. But, whatever our objections may be, we cannot deny that Christ expressed the meaning most clearly and distinctly, namely, that man, according to his teaching, must not resist evil; he who fully accepts his teaching cannot resist evil. And yet, neither believers nor unbelievers understand such simple and clear meaning of the words of Christ.

## Chapter 2

When I at last clearly comprehended that the words ‘do not resist evil’ do really mean that we are never to resist evil, my former ideas concerning the teaching of Christ underwent a complete change. I wondered, not so much at my eyes being opened to the truth at last, but at the strange darkness that had, until then, enveloped my understanding. I knew – we all know – that the foundation requirement of the Christian teaching is love toward people. Isn’t all Christianity summed up in the words, ‘turn the other cheek’, ‘love your enemies’? I had known that from my earliest childhood. How was it, then, that I had not hitherto taken in these words in all their simplicity, but rather had sought for some allegorical meaning in them? ‘Do not resist evil’ means never to resist evil, i.e., never commit violence to anyone. If a man reviles you, do not revile him in return; suffer, but do no violence. Christ said it so clearly and simply that could not be said clearer. While believing, or at least endeavoring to believe, that he who gave us this commandment was God, how did I come to say that I could not obey it in my own strength? If my master were to say to me, ‘Go and cut wood,’ and I were to answer that I could not do it in my own strength, would it not show that either I had no faith in my master’s words, or that I did not choose to obey him? He gave us the commandment of God to follow, he said that those who fulfill it and teaches it to others shall receive much more; he says that only those who keep His commandment shall receive life; he fulfilled this commandment himself, as offering us his example; he expressed this commandment in such an easy and clear way that there can be no doubts about its meaning; and how could I then say that, though I never really tried to fulfill it, this rule was one that it was impossible for a man to keep in his own strength, and without supernatural aid?

God became man for the securing of our salvation. Salvation lies in the fact that the second person of the Trinity, God the Son, suffered for us men, redeemed us from sin, and gave us the Church through which the grace of God is transmitted to all believers. Moreover, God the Son has left us this teaching (teaching), and His own example, to show us the way of salvation. And yet, I told that the rule of life given to us by Christ was not only a hard one, but also an impossible one, apart from supernatural aid. Christ does not consider it as such. On the contrary, he says definitely that we are to fulfill

his commandments, and that he who does not shall not enter the kingdom of God. He does not say that it is hard to keep this law; he says, on the contrary, 'My yoke is easy and my burden is light.' St. John the Evangelist says, 'His commandments are not grievous.' How was it, I said, that the express and positive commandment of God, which He Himself speaks of as being easy, the commandment which He Himself obeyed as a man, and which His first followers also fulfilled, was too hard for me, and even impossible for me, without supernatural aid? If a man were to set all the faculties of his mind to the annulling of a given law, what more forcible argument could he use for its suppression than that it was an impracticable law, and that the legislator's own opinion of it was that it could not be kept without supernatural aid? And yet, this was exactly what I had thought about the commandment 'not to resist evil.' I tried to remember when and how the strange idea had first come into my mind, that the teaching of Christ was divine in authority but impossible in practice. On reviewing my past life, I discovered that this idea had never been transmitted to me in all its nakedness, for then it would have repelled me; but that I had imperceptibly imbibed it from my earliest childhood, and that the associations of my life had confirmed the strange error.

I was taught from my childhood that Christ is God and that His teaching is divine and authoritative; while, on the other hand, I was also told to respect those institutions that, by means of violence, secured my safety from evil; I was taught to honor those institutions as being sacred. I was taught to resist evil; and it was instilled into me that it was humiliating and dishonorable to submit to evil and to suffer from it; and that it was praiseworthy to resist evil. I was taught to condemn and to execute. I was taught to fight, i.e., to resist evil by murder. The army, a member of which I was, was called a 'Christ-loving' army, and the Church consecrated its mission. I was taught from my childhood and until my adulthood to respect that what directly contradicts the law of Christ. I was taught to resist an offender by violence and to avenge a private insult, or one against my native land, by violence. All this was never regarded as wrong, but, on the contrary, I was told that it was perfectly right and in no way contrary to Christ's teaching.

All surrounding interests, such as the peace and safety of my family, my property, and myself were based on the law that was rejected by Christ – on

the law of a 'tooth for a tooth.'

Ecclesiastical teachers told me that the teaching of Christ was divine, but that its observance was impossible on account of the weakness of human nature; and that the grace of God alone could enable us to keep this law. Secular teachers told me, and the whole order of life proved, that the teaching of Christ was impracticable and ideal, which, in words and deeds, taught the behavior contrary to his teaching. I imbibed such a notion of the practical impossibility of following the divine teaching gradually and almost imperceptibly. I was so accustomed to it, it coincided so well with all my animal desires, so that I had never observed the contradiction in which I lived. I did not see that it was impossible to admit the Godhead of Christ – the basis of whose teaching is non-resistance of evil – and, at the same time, to work consciously and calmly for the institutions of property, courts of law, states, the army, establish life contrary to the teaching of Christ, and then pray to the same Christ that we might be enabled to keep His commandments – to 'forgive,' and not to 'resist evil.' It did not then occur to me, as it does now, that it would be much simpler to regulate our lives according to the teaching of Christ; and then, if courts of law, executions, and war were found to be indispensably necessary for our welfare, we might pray to have them too.

And I understood from where my error arose. It arose from my professing Christ in words and denying him in deed.

The principle 'not to resist evil' is one that contains the whole substance of Christ's teaching, but only when we consider it not only as a saying, but also as a law we are bound to obey.

It is like a latchkey that will open any door, but only if it is well inserted into the lock. To consider this rule of life as a principle that cannot be obeyed without supernatural aid is to annihilate the whole teaching of Christ completely. How can a teaching, the fundamental law of which is cast aside as impracticable, be considered practicable in any of its details? To nonbelievers, it even seems straight foolish and cannot be considered otherwise.

It is like to build a car, run engine but not to insert a timing belt. This is what

was done with Christ's teaching when we were taught that it was possible to be a Christian without fulfilling his law not to resist evil.

A few days ago I was reading the fifth chapter of St. Matthew to a Hebrew rabbi. 'That is in the Bible – that is in the Talmud too,' he said at almost each saying, pointing out to me, in the Bible and the Talmud passages very much like those in the Sermon on the Mount. But when I came to the verse that says, 'do not resist evil,' he did not say that is also in the Talmud; but only asked me with a smile, 'Do Christians keep this law? Do they turn the other cheek to be struck?' I was silent. What answer could I give, when I knew that Christians, in our days, far from turning the other cheek when struck, never let an opportunity escape of striking a Hebrew on both cheeks. I was greatly interested to know if there was any law like this in the Talmud, and I inquired. He answered, "No, there is nothing like it; but pray tell me, do Christians ever keep this law?" His question showed me clearly that the existence of the precept in the law of Christ, which is not only left unobserved, but of which the fulfillment is considered impossible, is superfluous and irrational. And I was not able to answer that.

Now that I comprehend the true meaning of the teaching, I see clearly the strange state of contradiction within my own self that I had permitted to arise. I was confessing Christ as God, and His teaching as divine, and at the same time I was arranging my life contrary to that teaching. What was left for me to do but to acknowledge the teaching as an impracticable one? In word I acknowledged the teaching of Christ as sacred; but I did not carry out that teaching in deed, for I admitted and respected the unchristian institutions that surrounded me.

Throughout the Old Testament we find it said that the misfortunes of the Israelites arose from their believing in false gods, and not in the true God. In the eighth and twelfth chapters of the first Book of Samuel, the prophet accuses the people of having chosen, instead of God, who was their King, a human king who, according to their opinion, was to save them. 'Do not believe in [tohu] vain things,' says Samuel to the people (1Sa.12:21). 'They will not help you and will not save you, for they are [tohu] vain. In order not to perish with your king, keep God alone.'

My faith in these 'tohu,' in these empty idols, hid the truth from my eyes. In

my way to Him these 'tohu,' which I did not have the strength to renounce, stood before me, obscuring His light.

One day, as I was passing through Borovitzki gate, I saw a crippled old beggar with his head bound up in a ragged cloth and sitting in a corner. I had just taken out my purse to bestow a trifle upon him, when a bold, ruddy-faced young grenadier in a government fur coat came running down the Kremlin slope. On seeing the soldier, the beggar sprang up with a look of terror and ran limping down toward the Alexander Garden. The grenadier pursued him, but, not succeeding in overtaking him, stopped short and began to abuse the poor fellow for having dared to sit down near the entrance-gate in defiance of orders. I waited until the grenadier came up to where I stood, and then asked if he could read.

'Yes; what of that?' was the answer. 'Have you ever read the gospel?' 'I have.' 'Do you know these words: "He who feeds the hungry ..."?' I repeated the text to him. He listened attentively. Two passers-by stopped. It was evidently disagreeable to the grenadier that, while conscientiously discharging his duty by driving people away from the entrance-gate, as he was ordered to do, he unexpectedly found himself in the wrong. He looked puzzled, and seemed to be searching for some excuse. Suddenly his dark eyes brightened up with a look of intelligence, and, moving away as if about to return to his post, he asked, 'Have you read the military code?' I told him that I had not. 'Well, then, do not talk of what you do not understand,' he said, with a triumphant shake of his head; and muffling himself up in his overcoat, he went back to his post.

He was the only man I have met in all my life who strictly, logically, solved the problem of our social institutions, which had stood before me, and still stands before each who calls himself a Christian.



## Chapter 3

To affirm that the Christian teaching refers only to personal salvation and has no bearing upon state affairs is a great error. To say so is but to assert an audacious, groundless, most evident untruth, which a moment's serious reflection suffices to destroy. 'Well,' I say to myself, 'I will not resist evil; as a private man, I will let myself be struck; but what am I to do if an enemy invades my native land, or other nations oppress it? I am called upon to take part in a struggle against evil – to go and kill.' The question immediately arises: which will be serving God, and which will be serving 'tohu'? To go, or not to go? Suppose I am a peasant. I am chosen as the senior member of my village, as judge, as juryman. I am bound to take an oath, to judge, and to punish. Fellow-creature, what am I to do? I have again to choose between the law of God and the law of man. Or let us say I am a monk and live in a monastery; the neighboring peasants have taken possession of the hay we had mown for our own use. I am sent to take part in a struggle against evil – to prosecute these men. I have again to choose between the laws of God and the laws of man. None of us can evade the demand for such a decision. To say nothing of the class of society that I belong to – military men, judges, administrators, whose whole lives are passed in resisting evil – there is not a single private individual, be he ever so insignificant, who has not had to choose between serving God by fulfilling His commandments, or serving the 'tohu' in the government institutions of his country. Our private lives are interwoven with the organization of the state, and the latter requires unchristian duties of us, contrary to the commandments of Christ. At the present time, the military service, which is obligatory on all, and the participation of each, as jurymen, in the courts of law, place this dilemma with striking clarity before all. Each man is called upon to take up an instrument of murder – a gun, a sword – even if he does not kill a fellow-creature; he loads the gun and sharpens the sword, i.e. , he is ready to commit murder. Each citizen is called upon to enter the courts of law, to take part in judging and punishing his fellow-creature; i.e., each must renounce the teaching of Christ that teaches us not to resist evil, not just in word but in deed.

The grenadier's question: the gospel or the military code, the law of God or the law of man? It still stands before all of us, as it did in the time of Samuel.

It stood before Christ and His disciples. It now stands before all those who wish to be Christians; it stood before me.

The teaching of Christ, which teaches love, humility, and self-denial, had always attracted me. But, both in the history of the past and in the present organization of our lives, I have encountered a contrary law – a law repugnant to my heart, my conscience, and my reason, but one that flattered my animal instincts. I knew that if I accepted the teaching of Christ, I should be forsaken, miserable, persecuted, and sorrowing, as Christ tells us His followers will be. I knew that if I accepted that law of man, I should have the approbation of my fellow-men; I should be at peace and in safety; all possible sophisms would be at hand to quiet my conscience and I should ‘laugh and be merry,’ as Christ says. I felt this, and therefore I avoided a closer examination of the law of Christ, and tried to comprehend it in a way that should not prevent my still leading my animal life. But, finding that impossible, I desisted from all attempts at comprehension.

This led me into a state of mental obscurity, which now seems surprising to me. For instance, let me recall my former interpretation of the words, ‘Do not judge, and you shall not be judged’ (Matt. 7:1). ‘Do not judge, and you shall not be judged; do not condemn, and you shall not be condemned’ (Luke 6:37). The court of law of which I was a member, and which guarded my property and my personal safety, seemed to me so unquestionably sacred that it never came into my mind that the words ‘do not condemn’ could have any higher meaning than that we were not to speak evil of our fellow-men. The idea never occurred to me that these words could have any reference to courts of law, district courts, criminal courts, assizes, courts of peace, etc. When I at last took in the real meaning of the words ‘do not resist evil,’ the question arose in my mind, ‘What would Christ’s opinion be of all these courts of law?’ And seeing clearly that He would reject them, I asked myself, ‘Do these words mean that we are not only never to speak ill of our brethren, but that we are not to condemn them to punishment by our human institutions of justice?’

In the gospel of St. Luke, chapter 6, verses 37-39, these words come immediately after the commandment not to resist evil, and to return good for evil. After the words, ‘Be merciful, even as your Father in heaven is

merciful,' we read, 'Do not judge, and you shall not be judged; do not condemn, and you shall not be condemned.' 'Doesn't it mean that we are not only never to condemn our brother in word – i.e. , speak evil of him – but that we are not to institute courts of law for the condemnation of a fellow-creature to punishment?' I said to myself; and no sooner did this question arise, than both my heart and my reason answered in the affirmative.

I know how greatly this way of understanding the words surprises everyone at first. I was surprised, too. To show how far I formerly was from the true interpretation of these words, I may here mention a foolish saying of mine, of which I am now heartily ashamed. Even after having become a believer, and having recognized the divinity of the gospel, I used to say, jokingly, on meeting with a friend who was an attorney or a judge, 'So, you go on judging, and yet isn't it said, "Do not judge, and you shall not be judged"?' I was so firmly convinced that these words had no other meaning than that we were not to speak ill of one another, that I did not see the blasphemy of my own words. So sure was I that the words were not to be taken in a literal sense, that I used them – jokingly – in their true application.

I shall give a circumstantial account of the way in which all my doubts as to the real sense of these words were dispersed, and how it became evident to me that Christ forbids all human institutions of justice, and that He could mean nothing else.

The first point that struck me, when I understood the commandment, 'Do not resist evil,' in its true meaning, was that human courts were not only contrary to this commandment, but in direct opposition to the whole teaching of Christ, and that therefore He must certainly have forbidden them.

Christ says, 'Do not resist evil.' The sole object of courts of law is – to resist evil. Christ enjoins us to return good for evil. Courts of law return evil for evil. Christ says, 'Make no distinction between the just and the unjust.' Courts of law do nothing else. Christ says, 'Forgive all. Forgive not once, not seven times, but forgive without end.' 'Love your enemies.' 'Do good to those who hate you.' Courts of law do not forgive, but they punish; they do not do good, but evil, to those whom they call the enemies of society. So,

the true sense of the teaching is that Christ forbids all courts of law. 'This cannot be the case,' I said to myself, 'Christ had nothing to do with human courts of law, and never considered them.' But I soon saw that this supposition was impossible. From the day of his birth, Christ encountered the jurisdiction of Herod, the Sanhedrin, and the high priests. Indeed, we find that Christ speaks more than once of tribunals as being an evil. He tells his disciples that they will have to be cited before the tribunals, and teaches them how they are to behave in courts of law. He says that he Himself will be condemned, and sets us all an example of the way in which we are to treat the laws of man. There can be no doubt that Christ meant the human courts of law, which were to condemn him and his disciples; which have always condemned, and still continue to condemn, millions of men. Christ must have seen this evil, for he distinctly points it out. In the case of the adulteress he positively rejects human justice and proves that, on account of each man's own sinful nature, he has no right to judge another. We find the same teaching repeated several times, as when he says, for instance, that the one who has a beam in his own eye cannot see the mote in his neighbor's eye; and that the blind cannot lead the blind. It even explains what such delusion causes: the student becomes like his teacher.

'But, perhaps,' I said to myself, 'this applies only to the judgment of the adulteress, and the parable of the mote is only intended to show us the frailty of human nature in general. Perhaps Christ does not intend to forbid our having recourse to human justice for our protection against evil men.' But I saw that this would not hold true either.

In the Sermon on the Mount, addressed to all men, he says, 'And if anyone sues you at the law for your coat, let him have your cloak also.' Therefore he forbids our going to law.

But perhaps this applies only to the relations between private individuals and public courts of law. Perhaps Christ does not deny justice itself, and admits in Christian societies the existence of persons chosen for the purpose of administering justice. I see that this hypothesis is likewise inadmissible. In his prayer Christ enjoins all men, without any exception, to forgive as they hope to be forgiven. We find the same precept repeated many times. Each man must forgive his brother when he prays, and before bringing his gift.

How, then, can a man judge and condemn another when, according to the faith he professes, he is bound to forgive? Thus I see that, according to the teaching of Christ, a judge who condemns his fellow-creature to death is no Christian.

But perhaps the connection between the words, 'do not judge, do not condemn,' and those that follow proves that they do not refer to human courts of law? This is likewise false. On the contrary, the connection between these words and those that follow proves clearly that the words 'do not judge' are directed precisely against the institutions of courts of law. According to the gospels of Matthew and Luke, the texts, 'Do not judge; do not condemn,' are preceded by the words, 'Do not resist evil, suffer evil, do good to all.' In the gospel according to Matthew the words of the Hebrew criminal law are repeated, 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.' And after citing the criminal law, Christ says, 'But you are not to act thus; do not resist evil.' Then he goes on to say, 'Do not judge.' So Christ's words refer precisely to our human criminal law, and by the words 'do not judge' he clearly rejects it.

Besides this, we find in St. Luke that he not only says, 'Do not judge,' but also adds, 'and do not condemn.' The latter word, almost synonymous with the former, must have been added with some purpose, and it could have been with no other than that of showing clearly the sense in which the first word is to be taken.

Had he wished to say, 'Do not judge your neighbor,' i.e., 'do not speak evil of him,' he would have said so; but he says plainly, 'Do not condemn,' and then adds, 'and you shall not be condemned; forgive, and you shall be forgiven.'

But perhaps Christ's words do not apply to courts of law at all, and I give them an interpretation of my own that is foreign to them.

I tried to discover how the first followers of Christ, His disciples, considered human courts of law, and whether they approved of them. In chapter 4, verses 11 and 12, the disciple James says, 'Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of his brother, and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law, and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and

to destroy. Who are you to judge another?’

The word that is translated as ‘do not speak evil’ is the word καταλαλεω. Even without consulting the dictionary, it is evident to all that this word can mean nothing but ‘to accuse.’ That is the only true meaning of the word, as anyone can find by consulting the dictionary. The translation of the passage in question is as follows: ‘He who speaks evil of his brother speaks evil of the law,’ and the question involuntarily arises, ‘How so?’ In speaking evil of my brother, I do not speak evil of the law of man. No; but if I accuse and sit in judgment over my brother, I evidently condemn the teaching of Christ; i.e., I look upon the teaching of Christ as insufficient, and thus judge and condemn the law of God. It clearly follows that I do not fulfill this law, but I myself become a judge. ‘A judge,’ Christ says, ‘is he who can save.’ Then how can I, being unable to save, be a judge and punish?

This whole text speaks of human judgment, and rejects it. The whole of this epistle is penetrated with the same idea. In the same epistle of James (2:1-13) he says, ‘My brethren, do not have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, together with a respect of persons. For if there comes into your assembly a man with a gold ring in fine clothes, and there comes in also a poor man in shabby clothes; and you have respect for him who wears the fine clothing, and if you say to him, “Sit here in a good place,” and say to the poor man, “Stand there,” or, “Sit here under my footstool,” are you not then being partial, and have you not become judges with evil thoughts? Harken, my beloved brethren, hasn’t God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which He has promised to those who love Him? But you have despised the poor. Don’t rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seat? Don’t they blaspheme that worthy name by which you are called? If you fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev.19:18), you do well. But if you have respect to persons, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not kill.” Now if you commit no adultery, yet if you kill, you have become a transgressor of the law (De.22:22; Le.28:17-255). So speak and act as those who shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he who has shown no mercy shall have judgment without mercy; mercy triumphs over the law.’

(The last words, 'mercy triumphs over the law,' have often been translated as, 'Mercy is extolled in judgment,' and are cited as meaning that the existence of human judgment may be admitted, provided that it is merciful.)

James exhorts his brethren to make no difference between men. If you make any difference, then you διακρίνετε, become partial, and are like judges with evil thoughts. You judge the beggar as being less worthy than the rich man. On the contrary, the rich man is the less worthy one. It is he who oppresses you and draws you before the judgment seat. If you live according to the law of love and mercy (which James calls the royal law to distinguish it from the other), you do well. But if you have respect of persons, and make a distinction between rich and poor, you are transgressors of the law of mercy. James, bearing in mind the case of the adulteress who was brought before Christ to be stoned, or perhaps speaking of adultery in general, says that he who punishes an adulteress with death is guilty of murder, and transgresses the eternal law, because the same eternal law that forbids adultery also forbids murder. He says, 'And act like men who are judged by the law of liberty; because there is no mercy for him who is himself without mercy, and therefore mercy destroys judgment.'

Can anything be more clear and definite? Every distinction between men is forbidden, every judgment by which we consider the one as good and the other as bad; human justice is distinctly pointed out as being evil; it is clearly shown that judgment sins by punishing for crime, and that all judgment is annihilated by the law of God – mercy.

I read the epistle of Paul the apostle, who had himself suffered from courts of law, and in his first chapter to the Romans he warns them against their vices and errors, and speaks against their courts of law (Ro.1:32). 'Who, knowing the judgment of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in those who do them.'

Romans 2:1-4: 'Therefore you are without excuse, you who judge; for when you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge do the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who commit such things. And do you think that when you judge those who do such things, and do the same things yourself, that you shall escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of His



goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?’

The apostle Paul says, while fully aware of the just judgment of God, men act unjustly themselves, and they teach others to do the same; therefore the man who judges another cannot be justified.

Such is the opinion I find in the epistles of the apostles in reference to courts of law. We all know that, during the whole course of their lives, human courts of law could never have been considered by them as anything but evil – a trial that was to be endured with firmness and submission to the will of God.

On reviewing the position of the early Christians amidst the heathens, we clearly perceive that men who were themselves persecuted by human courts of law could never have dared openly to forbid them. They could only occasionally allude to them as an evil, the basis of which they could not admit.

I examine the writings of the earliest teachers of Christianity, and I find that they all consider the precept never to use force, never to condemn or execute, as the one that distinguishes their teaching from all others (Athenagorus, Origen). They only submit to the tortures inflicted upon them by human justice. The martyrs all confessed the same, not only in word, but also in deed. I find that all true Christians, from the disciples up to the time of Constantine, regarded courts of law as evils that had to be endured with patience; and the possibility of a Christian’s taking any part in judging another never occurred to any one of them.

All this convinced me that the words of Christ ‘do not judge and do not condemn’ apply to courts of law; and yet these words are so generally understood as meaning only ‘speak no evil of your neighbor,’ that courts of law flourish, so boldly and with such assurance, in all Christian states, and are openly upheld by the Church. It was some time before I could feel quite convinced that my interpretation was the right one. ‘If all have until now interpreted the words as referring to evil speaking, and have, consequently instituted these courts of law, they must have some good grounds for acting thus,’ I said to myself, ‘and I must be in the wrong.’

And I turned to the commentaries of the Church. In all of them, from the fifth century to the present day, I found that these words are considered as signifying to condemn in word – i.e., to speak evil of our neighbor. Now if these words are understood as meaning nothing else, doesn't the question immediately arise, 'How can we help judging others?' Must not we condemn (blame) what is evil? Thus the point on which all comments turn is: what may we condemn, and what may we not condemn? We are told that these words cannot be considered as forbidding the servants of the Church to judge – that the apostles themselves judged (Chrysostom and Theophilactus). We are told that these words of Christ probably applied to the Jews, who often used to accuse their neighbors of trifling sins while committing greater ones themselves. But nowhere is there a word said about our human institutions of courts of law, or of the reference that this precept not to judge might have to them. Does Christ forbid them, or does he approve of them? This question, which arises so naturally in our minds, is left unanswered, as if there could not be the slightest doubt that, when once a Christian has taken his seat in the judgment hall, he has a right, not only to judge his neighbor, but also even to condemn him to death.

I consulted the Greek, Catholic, and Protestant theologians, as well as the works of the Tübingen school, and found that even the most liberal interpreters considered these words as meaning 'not to speak evil of.' Not one of them solves the question why so narrow an interpretation is given, and why they are not considered as prohibiting the institution of courts of law; or why Christ, while forbidding our speaking evil of a fellow-creature – which each of us may often do inadvertently – does not consider as wrong, and does not forbid, the same condemnation when given consciously and accompanied by violence against the condemned man. That the word 'condemn' may apply to judiciary condemnation, from which millions suffer, is not even hinted at. Nor is this all. By means of these very words, 'do not judge and do not condemn,' the form of judiciary condemnation is set altogether apart, and fenced round. Our theological interpretations say that the existence of courts of law in Christian states is necessary, and is not contrary to the law of Christ.

This made me doubt the sincerity of these interpretations, and I applied myself to a closer examination of the translation of the words 'judge' and

‘condemn,’ which is the thing I ought to have begun with. In the original these words are κρινω and καταδικαζω. The incorrect rendering of the word καταλαλεω in the epistle of James, which is translated as ‘do not speak evil,’ confirmed my doubts of the correctness of the translation.

I consulted the translation of the words κρινω and καταδικαζω in the gospels in various languages, and I found that the word ‘to condemn’ is translated in the Vulgate and in French by the word condemnare; in Slavonic, осужд амъ; by Luther, verdammen – to damn, to doom.

The different renderings of these words increased my doubts, and I asked myself what the Greek word κρινω, used in both the above-mentioned gospels, could really mean, and what was the true signification of the word καταδικαζω, which is used by Luke the Evangelist, who wrote, according to the opinion of all able scholars, in good Greek? If a man, who knew nothing about the gospel and the interpretations given to it were to have this saying placed before him, how would he translate it?

I consulted the common dictionary, and I found that the word κρινω has many different meanings, and among others is very often used in the sense of ‘condemning by judgment’ – executing – but never in that of ‘evil-speaking.’ I consulted the glossary of the New Testament, and I found that this word is often used there in the sense of condemning by judgment. It is sometimes used as meaning ‘to take away,’ but never as ‘to speak evil of.’ And so I saw that the word κρινω may be rendered in several ways, but that a translation that renders it as ‘speaking evil of’ is the furthest from the original.

I looked for the word καταδικαζω and added to it the word κρινω, which has several meanings, for the purpose of explaining the sense in which the writer himself takes the first word. I looked in the common dictionary for the word καταδικαζω and I found that this word never had any other meaning than to ‘condemn by judgment’ or to ‘execute.’ I consulted the glossary of the New Testament, and I found that this word is used in the New Testament four times, and every time in the sense of ‘condemn,’ ‘execute.’ I consulted the context, and I found that this word is used in the epistle of James, chapter 5, verse 6, in which it is said, ‘You have condemned and killed the just.’ The word ‘condemned’ is the same word, καταδικαζω, which

is used in reference to Christ, who was condemned to death; and in no other way and in no other meaning is this word used, either in the whole New Testament or in any Greek dialect.

What can this mean? What a state of idiocy have I fallen into! All of us, when reflecting on the destiny of man, have been struck with terror at the sufferings and evils that our human criminal laws have brought into our lives – evils both for those who judge and for those who are judged, from the executions of Tshingis-Han in the second half of the 12th century and the revolutions to those of the present day.

No man of feeling has escaped the impression of horror and doubt concerning ‘good,’ produced by the recital, if not by the sight, of men executing their fellow-men by rods, the guillotine, or the gallows.

In the gospels, every word of which we esteem sacred, it is said clearly and distinctly, ‘You have the criminal law – a tooth for a tooth; and I give you a new one – do not resist the evil man. Fulfill this commandment all of you; do not return evil for evil; always do good to all; forgive all.’

And farther on we read, ‘Do not judge.’ Then, in order to render all doubt impossible as to the meaning of his words, Christ adds, ‘do not condemn to punishment by courts of law.’

My heart says clearly and distinctly, ‘Do not execute.’ Knowledge says, ‘Do not execute; the more you execute, the more evil there will be.’ Reason says, ‘Do not execute; you cannot put a stop to evil by evil.’ The Word of God, which I believe in, says the same. I used to read the whole teaching. I read these words, ‘Do not judge and you shall not be judged; do not condemn and you shall not be condemned; forgive and you shall be forgiven.’ I acknowledged that these were God’s words, and I thought they meant that we are not to gossip or slander, and I continued to consider courts of law as Christian institutions, and myself as a judge and a Christian! I was shocked at the grossness of the error I was indulging.

## Chapter 4

Now I understood what Christ meant when he said, 'You have heard that it has been said, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." And I say to you, do not resist evil.' Christ means, 'You have been taught to consider it right and rational to protect yourselves against evil by violence, to pluck out an eye for an eye, to institute courts of law for the punishment of criminals, and to have a police and an army to defend you against the attacks of an enemy; but I say to you, do no violence to any man, take no part in violence, never do evil to any man, not even to those whom you call your enemies.'

I now understood that, in this teaching of non-resistance, Christ not only tells us what the natural result of following his teaching will be, but by placing this same teaching in opposition to the Law of Moses, the Roman law, and the various codes of the present time, he clearly shows that it ought to be the basis of our social existence and should deliver us from the evil we have brought on ourselves. He says, 'You think to amend evil by your laws, but they only aggravate it. There is one way by which you can put a stop to evil; it is by indiscriminately returning good for evil. You have tried the other law for thousands of years; now try mine, which is the very reverse.'

Strange to say, I have had frequent opportunities lately of conversing with men of diverse opinions on this teaching of non-resistance. I have met with some who agreed with me, though these have been few. But there are two orders of men who always refuse to admit, even in principle, a direct understanding of this teaching, and warmly uphold the justice of resisting evil. They are men belonging to two extreme poles: our Christian conservative patriots, who consider their Church as the true orthodox one, and our revolutionary atheists. Neither the former nor the latter will give up their right to resist by violence what they consider as evil. Even their cleverest, most learned men close their eyes to the simple, self-evident truth, that if we admit the right of one man to resist what he considers as evil by violence, we cannot refuse another the right to resist by violence what he in his turn may consider as evil.

A short time ago I met with a correspondence particularly instructive as

bearing on this very point. It was carried on between an orthodox Slavophil and a Christian revolutionist. The former excused the violence of war in the name of his oppressed Slavonian brethren, and the latter vindicated the violence of the revolution in the name of his oppressed brethren, the Russian peasants. Both admit the necessity for violence, and both ground their reasoning on the teaching of Christ.

Each of us gives the teaching of Christ an interpretation of his own, but it is never the direct and simple one that flows out of His words.

We have grounded the conduct of our lives on a principle that he rejects; we do not choose to understand his teaching in its simple and direct sense. Those who call themselves 'believers' believe that Christ-God, the second Person of the Trinity, made Himself man in order to set us an example how to live, and they strictly fulfill the most complicated duties, such as preparing for the sacraments, building churches, sending out missionaries, naming pastors for parochial administration, etc.; they forget only one trifling circumstance – to do as he tells them. Unbelievers, on the other hand, try to regulate their lives somehow or other, but not in accordance with the law of Christ, feeling convinced beforehand that it is worthless. Nobody ever tries to fulfill his teaching. Nor is that all. Instead of making any effort to follow his commandments, both believers and unbelievers decide beforehand that to do so is impossible.

Christ clearly says that the law of resistance by violence, which you have made the basis of your lives, is unnatural and wrong; and he gives us instead the law of non-resistance, which, he tells us, can alone deliver us from evil. He says, 'You think to eradicate evil by your human laws of violence; they only increase it. During thousands and thousands of years you have tried to annihilate evil by evil, and you have not annihilated it; you have but increased it. Follow the teaching I give you by word and deed, and you will prove its practical power.'

Not only does he speak thus, but he also remains true to his own teaching not to resist evil in his life and in his death.

Believers take all this in with their ears and hear it read in churches, calling it the Word of God. They call him God, and then they say, 'His teaching is

sublime, but the organization of our lives renders its observance impossible; it would change the whole course of our lives, to which we are so used and with which we are so satisfied. Therefore, we believe in this teaching only as an ideal that mankind must strive after – an ideal that is to be attained by prayer, by believing in the sacraments, in redemption, and in the resurrection of the dead.’ Others, unbelievers, the free interpreters of Christ’s teaching, the historians of religion – Strauss, Renan, and others – adopting the interpretation of the Church, that this teaching has no direct application to life and is only an ideal teaching that can only serve to console the weak-minded, say, very seriously, that the teaching of Christ was all very well for the savage population of the deserts of Galilee, but that we, with our civilization, can only consider it as a lovely reverie ‘du charmant Docteur,’ as Renan calls Him. According to their opinion, Christ could not attain the height of understanding all the wisdom of our civilization and refinement. If he had stood on the same scale of civilization as these learned men, he would not have uttered those pretty trifles about the birds of the air, about letting one’s cheek be struck, and about taking no care for tomorrow. Learned historians judge Christianity according to what they see in our Christian society. Now the Christian society of our times considers our life as a good and holy one, with its institutions of solitary imprisonment, of fortresses, sweatshops, journals, brothels, and parliaments, while it only borrows from the teaching of Christ what is not against these habits of life. And, as Christ’s teaching is in direct opposition to all this, nothing is taken from that teaching but its mere words. The learned historians see this, and not having the same interest in concealing the fact as the so-called believers have, they subject this, for them, meaningless teaching of Christ to a profound analysis, argue against it, and prove on good grounds that Christianity never was anything but the dream of an idealist.

And yet it seems to me that before pronouncing an opinion upon the teaching of Christ, we ought clearly to understand what it is, and in order to decide whether his teaching is rational or not, it is necessary first of all to believe that he meant exactly what he said. This is just what neither the interpreters of the Church nor free-thinkers do, and the reason why is not hard to see.

We know very well that the teaching of Christ, as we have received it,



embraces all the errors into which humanity has fallen, all the 'tohu,' empty idols, the existence of which we try to justify by calling them church, government, culture, science, arts, and civilization, thinking thus to exclude them from the rank of errors. But Christ warns us against them all, without excluding any 'tohu.'

Not only Christ's words, but those of all Hebrew prophets, of John the Baptist, and of all the truly wise men who have ever lived, have referred to this same church, this same government, culture, civilization, etc., calling them evils and the causes of man's perdition.

For instance, suppose an architect were to say to the owner of a house, 'Your house is in a bad state; it must be wholly rebuilt,' and were then to go on giving all the necessary details about the kinds of beams that would be required, how they were to be cut, and where placed. If the owner were to turn a deaf ear to the architect's words about the ruinous condition of the house and the necessity for its being rebuilt, and were only to listen with a feigned interest to the secondary details concerning the proposed repairs, the architect's counsels would evidently appear but so much useless talk; and if the owner happened to feel no great respect for the builder, he would call his advice foolish. This is exactly what occurs with the teaching of Christ.

I used this simile for want of a better one, and I remember that Christ, while preaching his teaching, used one very like it. He said, 'I will destroy your temple, and within three days I will build up another.' He was crucified for these words. His teaching is crucified for the same reason up to the present time.

The least that can be required of those who judge another man's teaching is that they should take the teacher's words in the exact sense in which he uses them. Christ does not consider his teaching as some high ideal of what mankind should be but cannot attain to, nor does he consider it as a chimerical, poetical fancy, fit only to captivate the simple-minded inhabitants of Galilee; he considers his teaching as work – a work that is to save mankind. His suffering on the cross was no dream; he groaned in agony and died for his teaching. And how many people have died, and will still die, in the same cause? Such teaching cannot be called a dream.

Every teaching of truth is a dream for those who are in error. We have come to such a state of error that there are many among us who say, as I did myself formerly, that this teaching of Christ is chimerical because it is incompatible with the nature of man. It is incompatible with the nature of man, they say, to turn the other cheek when he has been struck; it is incompatible with the nature of man to give up his property to another – to work, not for himself, but for others. It is natural to man, they say, to protect himself, his own safety, that of his family, and his property – in other words, it is the nature of man to struggle for life. Learned lawyers prove scientifically that the most sacred duty of a man is to protect his rights – i.e., to struggle.

We need only for one moment to cast aside the idea that the present organization of our lives, as established by man, is the best and most sacred, and then the argument that the teaching of Christ is incompatible with human nature immediately turns against the arguer. Who will deny that it is repugnant and harrowing to a man's feelings to torture or kill, not only a man, but also even a dog, a hen, or a calf? (I have known men, living by agricultural labor, who have ceased entirely to eat meat only because they had to kill their own cattle.) And yet our lives are so organized that for one individual to obtain any advantage in life another must suffer, which is against human nature. The whole organization of our lives, the complicated mechanism of our institutions, whose sole object is violence, are but proofs of the degree to which violence is repugnant to human nature. No judge will ever undertake to strangle with his own hands the man whom he has condemned to death. No magistrate will himself drag a peasant from his weeping family in order to shut him up in prison. Not a single general, not a single soldier, would kill hundreds of Turks or Germans, and devastate their villages – no, not one of them would consent to wound a single man, were it not in war, and in obedience to discipline and the oath of allegiance. Cruelty is only exercised (thanks to our complicated social machinery) when it can be so divided among a number that none shall bear the sole responsibility, or recognize how unnatural all cruelty is. Some make laws, others apply them; others, again, drill their fellow-creatures into habits of discipline – i.e., of senseless passive obedience; and these same disciplined men, in their turn, do violence to others – killing without knowing why or wherefore. But

let a man even for a moment shake off in thought the net of worldly institutions that so ensnares him, and he will see what is really incompatible with his nature.

If once we cease to affirm that the evil we are so used to, and profit by, is an immutable divine truth, we may see clearly which is the more natural to man – violence, or the law of Christ. Which is better – to know that the comfort and safety of my family and myself, all my joys and pleasures, are obtained at the price of the misery, depravity, and suffering of millions, by yearly executions, by hundreds of thousands of suffering prisoners, and by millions of soldiers, policemen and sergeants torn from their homes and half stupefied by military discipline, who protect my idle pleasures by keeping starving men at a distance with their loaded pistols; to know that every dainty morsel I put into my mouth, or give my children, is obtained at the price of all this suffering, which is inevitable, in order to obtain these dainties; or to know that my fare is my own, that nobody suffers for the want of it, and that nobody has suffered in procuring it for me?

It is sufficient to comprehend, once and for all, that, in our present organization of life, every joy and every moment of peace is bought at the cost of the privations and sufferings of thousands, who are only restrained by violence, in order to see clearly what is natural to man; i.e., not only to the animal nature of man, but to his rational nature as well. It is sufficient to understand the teaching of Christ in all its high significance and with all the consequences it entails, to see that it is not inconsistent with human nature, but that, on the contrary, his whole teaching throws aside what is inconsistent with human nature – the delusive human doctrine of resistance of evil, which is the chief cause of all human misery.

The teaching of Christ, which teaches us not to resist evil is – a dream! But the sight of men in whose souls love and pity are innate, spending their lives in burning their brethren at the stake, scourging them, breaking them on the wheel, lashing, slitting their nostrils, putting them to the rack, keeping them fettered, sending them to the galleys or the gallows, shooting them, condemning to solitary confinement, imprisoning women and children, organizing the slaughter of tens of thousands by war, bringing about periodical revolutions and rebellions, the sight of others passively fulfilling

these atrocities, the sight of others again writhing under these tortures or avenging them – this is no dream!

When once we clearly understand the teaching of Christ, we see that it is not the world given by God to man for his happiness that is a dream, but the world such as men have made it for their own destruction that is a wild terrifying dream – the delirium of a madman – a dream from which it is enough to awake once, never to return to it.

God came down from heaven – the Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity – and became man to redeem us from the punishment entailed by the sin of Adam. We're taught to think that this God must speak in some mysterious, mystical way, difficult to be understood, that his words can only be understood through faith and God's grace; and yet God's words are so simple and so clear. He says, 'Do no evil to each other, and there will be no evil.' Is it possible that the revelation of God is so simple? Can this be all? All this is so familiar to us.

The prophet Elijah, having fled from the haunts of men and concealed himself in a rock, had it revealed to him that he should see God at the entrance of the cavern. A tempest arose – the trees were rent asunder. Elijah thought God was there and looked, but God was not there. The earth quaked, fire issued out of it, the rock was split in two, and the mountains fell. Elijah looked, but God was not there. Then all grew still and calm, and a light breeze wafted the fragrance of the freshened fields toward him. Elijah looked, and God was there! It is thus with the simple words of God, 'Do not resist evil.'

They are very simple, but they contain in themselves the sole and eternal law of God and man. This law is eternal, and if in history we find any progress made toward the annihilation of evil, it is due to those who truly understood the teaching of Christ, who suffered evil without resisting by violence. The progression of mankind toward good is brought about by martyrdom, not by tyranny. Fire cannot extinguish fire, no more than evil can extirpate evil. Good, meeting with evil and remaining untainted by it, can alone conquer evil. There is a law in the heart of each man that is immutable. Men may turn aside from it or conceal it from others; nevertheless it is the only path that leads to true happiness. Each step that

has brought us nearer to this great end was taken in the name of the teaching of Christ: 'Do not resist evil.' It is with great confidence the follower of Christ can say, in defiance of all the temptations around him and the threats held out to him, 'It is not by violence but by doing good that you will eradicate evil.' And if the progress is made slowly, it is only because the clarity, simplicity, and rationality of the teaching of Christ and its inevitable absolute necessity are concealed from the eyes of men in the most crafty and dangerous manner; concealed under a spurious teaching, falsely called his.

## Chapter 5

Everything tended to convince me that I had now found the true interpretation of Christ's teaching. But it was a long while before I could get used to the strange thought that after so many men had professed the teaching of Christ during 1,800 years, and had devoted their lives to the study of his teaching, it was given to me to discover his teaching as something altogether new. It seemed strange, nevertheless so it was. Christ's teaching of 'non-resistance' seemed to rise before me as something hitherto unknown and unfamiliar to me. And I asked myself how this could be. Had some false conception of Christ's teaching prevented my understanding it?

When I first began to read the gospel I was not in the position of one who heard the teaching of Christ for the first time. I already had a complete theory concerning the sense in which it was to be taken. Christ did not appear to me as a prophet, come to reveal the law of God to man, but rather as an expounder and amplifier of the indubitable divine law well known to me. I already possessed a complete, definite, and very complicated doctrine concerning God and the creation of the world and of man, as well as concerning the commandments of God, as transmitted to us through Moses.

In the gospel I found the words, 'You have been told, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," but I say to you, do not resist evil.' The precept, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,' was the commandment given by God to Moses. The precept, 'I say to you, do not resist evil,' was a new commandment that reversed the first.

Had I considered the teaching of Christ simply, without the theological theory I had imbibed from my earliest childhood, I should have understood the true sense of these simple words. I should have seen that Christ sets aside the old law and gives a new one. But it had been instilled into me that Christ did not reject the Law of Moses – that, on the contrary, he confirmed it to the least jot and tittle, and amplified it. The seventeenth and eighteenth verses of the fifth chapter of St. Matthew, which seem to confirm that assertion, had, in my former studies of the gospel, struck me by their obscurity, and had raised doubts in my mind. On reading the Old Testament,

especially the last books of Moses, in which so many trivial, useless, and even cruel laws are laid down, each preceded by the words, 'And God said to Moses,' it seemed passing strange to me that Christ should have confirmed such laws; his doing so seemed incomprehensible. But I then left the problem unsolved. I blindly believed the teaching of my childhood: that these commandments were inspired by the Holy Ghost, that they were in perfect harmony with each other, that Christ confirmed the Law of Moses, and that he amplified and completed it. I could, indeed, never clearly explain to myself wherein the amplification lay, nor how the striking opposition, so obvious to all, between the verses 17-20 and the words 'but I say to you' could be harmonized. But when I at last really understood the clear and simple meaning of Christ's teaching, I saw that these two commandments were in direct opposition to each other; that there could be no question of harmony between them, or of the one being an amplification of the other; that it was necessary to accept either the one or the other, and that the interpretation of verses 17-20 of the fifth chapter of St. Matthew, which, as I have already said, had struck me by their want of clarity, was erroneous.

On a second reading of the same verses 17-20, which had seemed so unintelligible to me, their meaning flashed full upon me.

This again was not the result of my having discovered anything new, or having made any alteration of the words; it was due solely to my having cast aside the false interpretation that had been given to them.

Christ says (Matthew 5:17-19), 'Do not think that I have come to destroy the law or (the teaching of) the prophets. I have not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle (the least particle) shall in no way pass from the law, until all is fulfilled.'

And (verse 20) he adds, 'Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven.'

Christ means by these words, 'I have not come to destroy the eternal law, for the fulfillment of which your books and prophecies are written; but I have come to teach you how to fulfill that eternal law. I speak not of the law that your teachers the Pharisees call the law of God, but of the eternal law,



which is less liable to change than heaven and earth.'

I here give the meaning of the text in other words, solely for the purpose of drawing the mind away from the incorrect interpretation usually offered. If this incorrect interpretation did not exist, we should see that the idea of Christ could not be better or more definitely expressed than by these words.

The interpretation that Christ does not reject the Mosaic Law is based on the fact that in this passage, without any ostensible reason (except the comparison of the jot of the written law) and contrary to the true sense, the word 'law' is treated as meaning the 'written law,' and not the eternal law. But Christ does not speak here of the written law. If Christ, in this passage, had spoken of the written law, he would have used the words 'the law and the prophets,' as he always does in speaking of the written law; but he uses a very different expression: 'the law or the prophets.' Had Christ meant to speak of the written law, he would have used the words 'the law and the prophets' in the next verse, which is but the continuation of the preceding one; but there He uses the word 'law' alone. Moreover we find, in the gospel according to St. Luke, that Christ uses the same words in a manner that leaves no doubt as to their true meaning (Luke 16:15). Christ says to the Pharisees, who thought to justify themselves by the written law, 'You are those who justify themselves before men; but God knows your hearts, for that which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God. The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presses into it.' And immediately after this, in the 17th verse, we read, 'And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail.' The words 'the law and the prophets, until John,' annul the written law. The words 'it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than for one tittle of the law to fail,' confirm the eternal law. In the first text Christ says 'the law and the prophets,' i.e. the written law; in the second He uses the word 'law' alone, i.e. the eternal law. It is obvious, therefore, that the eternal law is here set in opposition to the written law, and that exactly the same occurs in the context of the gospel of St. Matthew, where the eternal law is expressed by the words 'the law or the prophets.'

The history of the different renderings of this text (v.17-18) is very curious.

In most of the transcripts the word 'law' is not followed by the words 'and the prophets.' In this case there can be no doubt of its signifying 'the eternal law.' In other transcripts, as, for instance, in those of Tischendorf and the canonical transcripts, the word 'prophets' is added – not with the conjunction and, but with the disjunctive or – 'the law or the prophets,' which likewise excludes the meaning of 'the written law,' and confirms that of the 'eternal law.'

In some transcripts again, which are not adopted by the Church, we find the word 'prophets' preceded by the conjunction and, and not by or; in these transcripts, after the repetition of the word 'law,' the words 'and the prophets' are again added. Thus the meaning given to the whole saying, by this remodeling, is that Christ's words refer only to the written law.

These variations give us the history of the various interpretations to which this passage has been subjected. One point is obvious: Christ speaks here, as he does in the gospel according to St. Luke, of the eternal law; but we find men among the transcribers of the gospels who have added the words 'and the prophets' to the word 'law,' with the design of rendering the Mosaic Law obligatory, and have thus altered the sense of the text.

Other Christians, again, who reject the Mosaic Law, either leave out the word completely, or substitute the word η ( or ), for the word και ( and ). And thus the passage enters the canon with the disjunctive or. Yet though the text adopted by the canon is so indubitably clear, our canonical commentators continue to expound on the passage in the spirit of the alterations that have not been adopted. Countless commentators have treated this passage, and as the expounder agrees less with the simple, direct sense of the teaching of Christ, the further his commentary must necessarily be from the true sense of that teaching. The majority of expounders retain the apocryphal sense, which the text rejects.

In order to be convinced that Christ speaks in this verse only of the eternal law, it will suffice to fully understand the word that has given rise to these false interpretations. In Russian, it is 'законъ' (law); in Greek νομος; in Hebrew, 'tora.' This word has two principal meanings in the Russian, Greek, and Hebrew languages: the one, the unexpressed, unwritten law; the other, the written expression of what certain men call the law. Indeed, the

difference exists in all languages.

In Greek, in the epistles of Paul, the difference is sometimes marked by the use of the article. In speaking of the written law, the apostle omits the article before the word law, and when he speaks of the eternal law, the article is prefixed.

The ancient Hebrews, the prophets, and Isaiah always use the word 'tora' (the law) to indicate the eternal, unwritten, but revealed law of God. This same word 'tora' (the law) was first used by Ezra, and later we find it in the Talmud, as signifying the five books of Moses, which bear the general title of 'tora' in the same sense as our word 'Bible,' with this difference, however, that we distinguish the Bible from the law of God by two different denominations, while in the Hebrew language there is but one word for both.

Therefore Christ, using the word 'tora,' takes it in the two different accepted meanings of the word – either confirming it, as Isaiah and the other prophets do, in the sense of the law of God, which is eternal, or rejecting it, when He refers to the Mosaic Law. But in order to make a distinction between the different meanings of the word, he always adds 'and the prophets,' and the pronoun 'your,' in speaking of the written law.

When Christ says, 'As you would want men to treat you, also treat them likewise; this is the whole law and the prophets,' He refers to the written law. He tells us that the whole written law may be reduced to this sole expression of the eternal law; and, by these his words, He annuls the written law.

When he says (Luke 16:16), 'The law and the prophets until John the Baptist,' He refers to the written law, and by these words asserts that it is no longer obligatory.

When he says (John 7:19), 'Didn't Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keeps the law?' or (John 8:17), 'Isn't it said in your law?' or again (John 15:25), 'The word that is written in their law,' He refers to the written law – the law that he rejects – the law by which he was, soon after, sentenced to death. John 19:7: 'The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and by our law he ought to die".' It is obvious that this law of the Hebrews, by which Christ

himself was sentenced to death, was not the law that he taught. But when Christ says, 'I come, not to destroy the law, but to teach you to fulfill it, for nothing can be altered in the law, but all must be fulfilled,' He does not speak of the written law, but of the divine, eternal law.

It may be said that these proofs are controvertible; that I have skillfully assorted the contexts, and have carefully concealed all that could contradict my interpretation; that the commentaries given by the Church are very clear and convincing, and that Christ did not destroy the Law of Moses, but that he left it in full force. Let us suppose this to be the case. What, then, does Christ teach?

According to the commentaries of the Church, he taught men that he was the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son of God the Father, and that he had come down from heaven to redeem mankind from the sin of Adam. But whoever has read the gospel knows that Christ says nothing of this, or, at least, alludes to it in very ambiguous terms; the passages in which Christ speaks of himself as being the Second Person of the Trinity, and of his redeeming mankind, are the shortest and least perspicuous in the gospels. In what, then, does the rest of Christ's teaching consist? It is impossible to deny, what all Christians have always acknowledged, that the main point in Christ's teaching consists in his rules of life – how men are to live together.

Now, if we admit that Christ taught a new system of life, we must form some definite idea of the men among whom he taught.

Take, for instance, the Russians, the English, the Chinese, the Hindus, or even any wild insular tribe, and you will be sure to find that they all have their own rules of life, their own laws; and that no teacher could introduce new laws of life without destroying the former ones; he could not teach without infringing them. Such would be the case everywhere. The teacher would inevitably have to begin by destroying our laws, which have grown precious and almost sacred in our eyes. Perhaps in our days it might happen that the teacher of a new teaching of life would only destroy our civil laws, our government, and our customs without interfering with the laws that we call divine, though this is hardly probable. But the Hebrews had only one law – a divine law that embraced life in its minutest details. What could a preacher teach them if he began by declaring that the entire law of the

people to whom he preached was inviolable? But let us assume that this is not regarded as a proof. Then let those who assert that Christ's words confirm the Mosaic Law explain to themselves who they were whom Christ denounced during his whole life; who did he speak against, calling them Pharisees, lawyers, and scribes?

Who was it that refused to follow the teaching of Christ, and crucified Him?

If Christ acknowledged the Mosaic Law, where were the true followers of the law, whom Christ must have approved of? Is there a single one? We are told that the Pharisees were a sect. The Hebrews do not say so. They call the Pharisees the true fulfillers of the law. But let us suppose they were a sect. The Sadducees were also a sect. Where, then, were the true believers – those who did not belong to any sect?

In the gospel according to St. John, all the enemies of Christ are called Hebrews. They do not assent to Christ's teaching; they oppose it only because they are Hebrews. But in the gospel the Pharisees and Sadducees are not the only enemies of Christ; the lawgivers, who keep the Mosaic Law, the scribes, who study it, and the elders, who are considered as the representatives of the popular wisdom, are likewise called the enemies of Christ.

Christ says, 'I did not come to call the righteous to repentance,' to a change of life, μετανοια , 'but sinners.' Where were the righteous, and who were they? Surely Nicodemus was not the only one? And even Nicodemus is described as being a good man, but one who had gone astray. We have grown so used to the singular interpretation given to us, that the Pharisees and some wicked Hebrews crucified Christ, that the simple question never occurs to us, 'Where were the true Hebrews, who kept the law and who were neither Pharisees nor wicked men?' No sooner does the question arise than all grows clear. Christ, be he God or man, brought his teaching to a people who already had a law that gave them definite rules of life, and which they called the law of God. In what light could Christ have considered that law?

Every prophet – teacher of a faith – on revealing the law of God to a people, will find that they already possess a law that they consider as the divine law,

and he cannot avoid a twofold application of the word, as referring either to what men wrongly consider the law of God (your law) or as referring to the true eternal law of God. Moreover, not only is the preacher of the new teaching unable to avoid the two-fold use of the word, but it often happens that he does not even endeavor to do so, and purposely unites both ideas, in order to point out that the law confessed by those he tries to convert, though defective as a whole, is not devoid of some divine truths. And it is just these truths, so familiar to his hearers, which every preacher will take as the basis of his preaching. Christ does so in addressing the Hebrews, who have the same word 'tora' for both laws. Referring to the Mosaic Law, and more often still to the prophets, especially the prophet Isaiah, whom he often quotes, Christ acknowledges that in the Hebrew law, and in the prophets, there are eternal truths, divine truths, which coincide with the eternal law; and he bases his teaching upon them, as for instance in the saying 'Love God and your neighbor.'

Christ expresses this idea on many occasions, e.g., Luke 10:26: 'What is written in the law? How do you read it?' We may find the eternal truth in the law, if we can read. And he points out more than once that the precept contained in their law of love to God and their neighbor was a precept of the eternal law. After the parables by which he explains his teaching to his disciples, Christ says, as if in reference to all that had preceded, 'Therefore every scribe ( i.e. every man who can read and has been taught the truth) is like a householder who brings forth out of his treasure (indiscriminately) things old and new.' (Matthew 13:52)

It is thus that St. Irenaus understands these words, and so does the Church, and yet, arbitrarily transgressing the true sense of the saying, they attribute to these words the meaning that the whole ancient law is sacred. The obvious meaning of the text is that he who seeks for what is good, takes not only what is new, but what is old too, and that its being old is not a sufficient reason for throwing it aside. Christ means, by this saying, that he does not deny what is eternal in the ancient law. But when questioned concerning the law or its forms, he says, 'We do not pour new wine into old bottles.' Christ could not confirm the whole law, neither could he completely deny the law and the prophets; he could neither deny the law that says, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' nor the prophets, in whose word he often clothes his

thought.

And so, instead of our understanding these clear and simple words as they were said, and in the sense that the whole teaching of Christ confirms, an obscure interpretation is given to us, which introduces inconsistency where there is none, and thus destroys the true sense of the teaching, leaving nothing but words, and in reality re-establishing the Mosaic teaching with all its barbarous cruelty.

According to the commentaries of the Church, and those of the fifth century in particular, Christ did not destroy the written law, but confirmed it. But we are not told how he confirmed it, or how the law of Christ and the Mosaic Law can be supposed to be united into one. We find nothing in these commentaries but a play upon words. We are told that Christ kept the Mosaic Law by the prophecies concerning himself being fulfilled; and that Christ fulfilled the law through us, through the faith of men in him. No effort is made to solve the only question that is of essential importance to every believer: how these two contradictory laws, referring to life, can be united into one. The inconsistency of the text, which says that Christ does not destroy the law, with the one in which we read, 'It has been said...but I say to you,' (indeed the contradiction between the whole spirit of the Mosaic Law and the teaching of Christ) remains in all its force.

Let everyone who is interested in this question examine for himself the commentaries on this passage given to us by the Church, beginning from John Chrysostom to the present time. It is only after having read these that he will see clearly not only that no explanation of the contradiction is given, but also that a contradiction has been skillfully inserted where there was none before. The impossible attempts at uniting what cannot be united are clear proof that this was not an involuntary mental error, but was effected with some definite purpose in view; that it was found necessary; and the cause of its having been found necessary is obvious.

Let us see what John Chrysostom says in answer to those who reject the Mosaic Law (Commentary of the gospel according to St. Matthew, vol. 1, pp. 320, 321).

'On examining the ancient law that enjoins us to take an eye for an eye and

a tooth for a tooth, the objection is raised, 'How can he who speaks thus be righteous? What answer can we give?' Why, that it is, on the contrary, the best token of God's love toward man. It was not that we should really take an eye for an eye that he gave us this law, but that we should avoid wronging others for fear of suffering the same at their hands. As, for instance, when threatening the Ninevites with destruction, his desire was not to destroy them (had he indeed decreed their destruction he would not have spoken of it); his purpose was only, by his menaces, to induce them to amend their lives and, by so doing, turn his wrath aside. Thus likewise the hot-tempered, who are ready to put out their neighbors' eyes, are threatened with punishment for the sole purpose of making their fears of punishment restrain them from injuring their fellow-creatures. If this is cruelty, there is cruelty likewise in the commandment that forbids murder, or the one that interdicts adultery. But such an argument would only prove a man to have reached the last stage of madness. And I so dread calling these commandments cruel, that I should rather be inclined to consider a contrary law as wrong, according to plain common sense. You call God cruel because He has enjoined taking an eye for an eye; but I say that many would have had a greater right to call Him cruel, as you do, had He not given this commandment.' John Chrysostom plainly acknowledges the law of a tooth for a tooth to be the divine law, and the reverse of that law – i.e. Christ's teaching of non-resistance – to be wrong. Pages 322, 323: 'Let us suppose that the law is entirely cast aside,' says John Chrysostom further, 'that all fear of promised punishment is done away with, that the wicked are left to live according to their inclinations, without fear of punishment – adulterers, murderers, thieves, and perjurers. Wouldn't all be overthrown; wouldn't houses, marketplaces, cities, lands, seas, and the whole universe be full of iniquity? This is obvious. For if even the existence of laws, fear and threats of punishment, can hardly keep the evil intentioned with bounds, what would there then be to restrain men from evil deeds, if all obstacles were removed? What disasters would then rush in torrents into the lives of men! Cruelty lies not only in leaving the wicked free to act as they please, but in letting the innocent man suffer without defending him. If a man were to collect a crowd of miscreants around him, and having furnished them with weapons, were to send them forth into the town to kill all those they met in



the streets, could anything be more barbarous? And, on the contrary, if another were to bind these armed men and imprison them, releasing the victims who these miscreants had threatened with death, could anything be more humane?’

But John Chrysostom does not tell us by what the other is to be guided in his definition of the wicked. May he not himself be a wicked man, and imprison the good?

‘Now apply this example to the law. He who gave the commandment, “an eye for an eye” has bound the minds of the wicked in chains of fear, and may be compared to the man who bound the miscreants; but if no punishment were appointed for criminals, would it not be arming them with the weapons of fearlessness, and acting like him who gave weapons to the miscreants, and sent them forth into the town?’

If John Chrysostom does acknowledge the teaching of Christ, he ought to have told us who is to take an ‘eye for an eye,’ or a ‘tooth for a tooth,’ and cast into prison. If He who gave the commandment, that is, God Himself, were to inflict the threatened punishment, there would be no inconsistency; but it must be done by men, the men who were forbidden to do so by the Son of God. God said, ‘An eye for an eye.’ The Son says, ‘Do not act thus.’ One of the two commandments must be acknowledged as just. John Chrysostom and the Church follow the commandments of the Father – i.e., the Mosaic Law – and reject the commandments of the Son, while ostensibly professing His teaching.

Christ rejects the Mosaic Law, and gives his own instead. For him who believes Christ there is no contradiction. He pays no heed to the Mosaic Law, believes in Christ’s teaching, and fulfills it. Neither is there any contradiction for him who believes in the Mosaic Law. The Hebrews do not consider the words of Christ valid, and they believe in the Mosaic Law. There is a contradiction only for those who, while choosing to live according to the Mosaic Law, try to persuade themselves and others that they believe in the teaching of the Christ; only for those whom Christ calls, ‘You hypocrites, you generation of vipers.’

Instead of acknowledging one of the two – either the Mosaic Law or the

teaching of Christ – we say that both are divine truths.

But no sooner does the question touch upon life itself, than the teaching of Christ is straightway cast aside, and the Mosaic Law is acknowledged.

It is in this false interpretation, once we examine it closely, is the awful drama of battle between good and evil, light and darkness.

Christ appears amidst the Hebrews, who were entangled in countless minute rules, laid down by their Levites, and called by them the divine law, each of which was preceded by the words, 'And God said to Moses.' Not only the relations in which man stands to God, but the sacrifices, feast days, fasts, the relations between men – public, civil, and family relations – all the details of private life, circumcision, ablution of themselves and their cups, their clothes, all – even in the most trifling details – were encompassed by rules, and these were acknowledged as the commandments of God, the law of God. What could a prophet do – I do not say Christ-God – but what could a prophet, a teacher do, when teaching such a people, without first destroying the obligations of a law by which everything, down to the smallest detail of life, was thus regulated? Christ does what any other prophet would do. He takes from the old law, considered by the people as divine, what is truly the law of God. He takes the basic principles, setting all the rest aside, and he adds to it his own revelation of the eternal law.

Though all need not be cast aside, a law that is considered obligatory in all its minutest details must inevitably be violated. This is what Christ does, and he is accused of destroying the law of God; and he is crucified for this. But his teaching remains among his disciples, and passes on to other peoples. Yet, in the course of ages, and among the new peoples who receive Christ's truth, the same human interpretations and explanations shoot up. Again the shallow precepts of man appear in place of the divine revelation. Instead of the words, 'And God said to Moses,' we now read, 'By the revelation of the Holy Spirit.' Again the letter rather than the spirit of the teaching is preferred. It is a striking fact that the teaching of Christ is united to all this 'tora,' which he rejected. This 'tora' is said to be the revelation of the Spirit of Truth – i.e., of the Holy Ghost – and so Christ is taken in the meshes of his own revelation. And his whole teaching is reduced to nothing.

That is why now, after 1800 years, the strange duty has fallen to my lot to

discover the sense of Christ's teaching as something new.

I did not have to re-open it, but I had to do what all those who seek to know God and His law have to do: to find out the eternal law of God from amidst the precepts that men call His law.

## Chapter 6

Now I understood the Christ's law as the Christ's law, and not the mixed Law of Moses and Christ. The claim of his teaching clearly repudiates the claim of the Mosaic Law; and, consequently, instead of the obscurity, diffuseness, and inconsistency that I had previously found in the gospels, they now combine to form an indissoluble whole; and the basis, or central maxim, of the entire teaching is expressed in the simple, clear, and perfectly intelligible five commandments of Christ (Matt. 5:21-48), which I had hitherto failed to apprehend.

Mention is made in all the gospels of the 'commandments of Christ,' and their fulfillment is enjoined.

All theologians speak of the commandments of Christ, but I never knew what these commandments were. I supposed the commandment of Christ to be the exhortation to love God, and our neighbor as ourselves. I did not see that this could not be the commandment of Christ, seeing that it was a commandment given to the ancient Hebrews (see Deuteronomy and Leviticus). On reading the words, 'Whoever, therefore, shall break one of these commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be great in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:19),' I thought they referred to the Mosaic Law. It never occurred to me that the new commandments of Christ were clearly and distinctly expressed in verses 21-48 of the fifth chapter of St. Matthew. Nor did I notice that by the words, 'You have heard that it has been said...but I say to you,' Christ gives us new and most definite commandments; annexed to the five quotations of the Mosaic Law (reckoning the two quotations that refer to adultery as one), we find five new and definite commandments of Christ.

I had often heard about the Beatitudes, and had met with the enumeration and explanation of them in the course of the religious instruction given to me in my youth; but I never heard a word about the commandments of Christ. To my great surprise I had to discover them.

I shall now point out what led me to the discovery. In Matt. 5:21-26, we read, 'You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, "You shall not

kill; and whoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment.” (Exodus 20:23) But I say to you, that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment; and whoever shall say to his brother, *raca*, shall be in danger of the judgment; but whoever shall say, “You fool!” shall be in danger of hell-fire. Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you; leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest at any time the adversary deliver you to the judge, and the judge deliver you to the officer, and you be cast into prison. Truly I say to you, you shall by no means come out from there until you have paid the last kopeck.’

On a clear comprehension of the teaching of ‘non-resistance,’ it seemed to me that the text quoted above must have the same application to life as that teaching. I had formerly considered these words as meaning that we were to avoid all anger against a fellow-creature, that we were never to use abusive language, and that we were to live at peace with all, not excepting any; but there stood a clause in the text which excluded all possibility of thus understanding it. It is said, ‘whoever is angry with his brother without a cause,’ and the idea of unconditional peace is annulled by the last, italicized words. They puzzled me. I sought for a solution of my doubts in theological commentaries; but to my surprise I found that the interpretation of the Fathers of the Church were especially directed toward defining the cases in which anger may be excused and cannot be excused. Laying particular stress on the words ‘without a cause,’ commentators tell us the meaning of the text is that we are never to wound a man’s feelings causelessly, nor use abusive language; but add that anger is not always unjust, and in support of that opinion they cite instances of the anger of the apostles and the saints.

I was obliged to acknowledge that, though contrary to the whole spirit of the gospel, the interpretation of the Fathers, by which anger is accounted justifiable when, to use their own expression, it is *to the glory of God*,’ was consistent, being based on the words ‘without a cause,’ which we find in verse 22. This clause entirely altered the sense of the saying.

Do not be angry without a cause. Christ exhorts us to forgive all, to forgive

without end; Christ himself forgave, and when led away to be crucified, reproved Peter for defending him against Malchus; and yet it would seem that Peter had good cause for anger. And the same Christ exhorts all men not to be angry without a cause, thus justifying anger if there is a reason for it, if it is not causeless! Isn't it as if Christ, who came to preach peace to all simple-minded men, had, on second thoughts, added the words 'without a cause' to show that this precept did not apply to all cases indiscriminately – that anger might sometimes be justifiable? Commentators tell us that anger may be justifiable. 'But,' I said to myself, 'can any man be a fit judge of the reasonableness of his anger? Never yet have I seen an angry man who did not consider himself perfectly just in his anger. Each thinks his anger both lawful and necessary.' The words 'without a cause' seemed entirely to destroy the meaning of the text. But they were in the gospel, and I could not set them aside. And yet it came to much the same as if, to the saying 'Love your neighbor,' were added the words 'your neighbor who pleases you.' The words 'without a cause' destroyed the significance of the whole text for me.

Verses 23 and 24, in which we read that before praying we must be at peace with him who has something against us, which would have had a direct, obligatory sense without the words 'without a cause,' now acquired a conditional meaning.

It seemed to me that Christ must have meant to forbid all anger, all ill-will, and in order to suppress it, had enjoined each person, before he brings his gift to the altar – i.e., before he draws near to God – to think upon whether there is any man who is angry with him. And if there is someone, he must be reconciled to him first, and then he may bring his gift to the altar or pray. It seemed thus to me, but, according to all commentaries, the sense of the passage was conditional.

In all commentaries we are told that we must try to be at peace with all men; but if that is impossible, on account of the perversity of our adversary, we must be at peace with him in mind, in our thoughts, and then his enmity will be no barrier to our prayer. Moreover, the words that declare that whoever shall say 'raca,' or 'you fool,' commits a great sin, always seemed most strange and unintelligible to me. If the words forbid abusive language, why are such weak epithets chosen, which can hardly be reckoned terms of

abuse? And why was there so awful a threat against one who might, perhaps inadvertently, use as inoffensive a word as *raca* – i.e., a worthless fellow? This seemed incomprehensible to me.

I felt sure that there was the same misunderstanding here as I had found in the words ‘do not judge.’ I felt sure that a simple, definite, and highly important commandment, which all have it in their power to fulfill, had been perverted, as in the preceding instance, into something almost incomprehensible. I felt sure that Christ had not used the words, ‘be reconciled to your brother,’ in the sense now given to them by our commentators: ‘be reconciled to your brother in mind.’ Reconciled in mind! What can that mean? I thought that Christ meant exactly what he expressed in the words of the prophet, ‘I will have mercy’ – i.e., love to all men – ‘and not sacrifice.’ And therefore, if you wish to find favor in God’s sight, before repeating your morning and evening prayer, or before attending public worship, reflect whether anyone is angry with you; and if such a one can be found, go and be reconciled to him first, and then you may come and pray. Let your reconciliation no be ‘in mind’ only. I saw that the interpretation, which destroyed the direct and clear meaning of the text, was based on the words ‘without a cause.’ Their omission would render the whole perfectly clear; but the canonical gospel, in which stand the words ‘without a cause,’ and all commentaries upon it, were contrary to my interpretation.

Had I chosen arbitrarily to alter the sense of this passage, I might have done so with any other text as well; and might not other interpreters have done so too? All the difficulty lay in one little clause. If this clause were removed, all would be clear. So I endeavored to find some philological explanation of the words that should not destroy the sense of the text.

On consulting the dictionary, I saw the Greek word is *ειχη*, and that it likewise means ‘purposelessly, thoughtlessly.’ I again read the text over attentively, to see if any other meaning could be given to it, but found that the clause was evidently correct. I consulted the Greek dictionary, and the meaning given to the word was the same. I consulted the context, but the word is only used once in the gospels: in the passage in question. We find it several times in the epistles. In the first epistle to the Corinthians (15:2) it is used in the same sense. Therefore, there seemed to be no other possible

rendering of the text, and I found myself obliged to believe that Christ said, 'Do not be angry without a cause.' I must confess that, to believe in Christ's having uttered so indefinite a saying – which admits of an interpretation that reduces it to a mere nothing – seemed to me equivalent to an entire renunciation of the gospel itself. A last hope was left to me: was this clause to be found in all the transcripts of the gospel? I examined various translations. I looked in Griesbach's edition of the gospels, in which he enumerates all the transcripts in which a similar expression is used; and I found, to my great joy, that there were several references attached to this particular text. I examined them, and found that they referred to the very words, 'without a cause.' In the greater number of the transcripts of the gospel, and in the commentaries of the Fathers of the Church, these words are omitted. Thus, the majority understood the text as I do. I then consulted the first transcript of Tischendorf, but the words are not there. The shortest way to solve the problem would have been to look in Luther's translation of the gospel; but the words are not to be found there either.

The clause, which so entirely destroys the sense of Christ's teaching, was an addition made in the fifth century, and it is not to be found in any of the most trustworthy transcripts of the gospel.

Someone had inserted the clause, and others had approved of it, and then tried to explain it.

Christ never could have added so monstrous a clause; and the simple, direct meaning of the text, which had first struck me, and must strike others, is the true one.

Nor is this all; for, no sooner did I understand that Christ's words forbade anger against any person whatever, than the command not to call a fellow-creature 'raca,' or 'you fool,' struck me in a new light, and I could no longer consider it as being intended to forbid the use of abusive language. The untranslated word *raca* opened my eyes to the true sense. The word *raca* means 'trampled upon, set at naught, made of no account.' The word *rac* is a word very generally used, and it signifies 'excepting,' 'only not.' *Raca*, therefore, means a man unworthy of the title of man. We find the plural, *rakim*, used in the Book of Judges (9:4) in the sense of 'lost.' So this is the word we are forbidden by Christ to use in speaking of a fellow-creature. In



the same manner he forbids our saying 'you fool,' words by which we may consider ourselves justified in setting aside our duty toward our neighbor. We give way to anger, wrong others, and allege for our justification that the man who has excited our anger is a lost man or a fool. And these are the epithets that we are forbidden by Christ to apply to any man. He forbids our giving way to anger against our fellow-creatures; he forbids our justifying our anger by calling its object a lost man or a fool.

And now, in the place of an indistinct, indefinite, and insignificant expression, subject to countless arbitrary interpretations, the first simple, clear, and distinct commandment of Christ arose before me, as contained in verses 21-26: 'Be at peace with all men, and never consider your anger as just. Never look upon any man as worthless or a fool, neither call him such. Not only shall you never think yourself justified in your anger, but also you shall never consider your brother's anger as causeless; and therefore, if there is one who is angry with you, even if it is without a cause, go and be reconciled to him before praying. Endeavor to destroy all enmity between yourself and others, that their enmity may not grow and destroy you.'

And now the second commandment of Christ, which also begins with a reference to the ancient law, grew clear to me also. Matthew 5:27-32: 'You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, "You shall not commit adultery." (Exodus 20:14-28) But I say to you that whoever looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if your right eye offends you, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is profitable for you that one of your members should perish, and not that your whole body should be cast into hell. And if your right hand offends you, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is profitable for you that one of your members should perish, and not that your whole body should be cast into hell. It has been said, "Whoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement." (Deuteronomy 24:1) But I say to you that whoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever shall marry a divorced woman commits adultery.'

I understood these words to signify that no man must ever admit, even in thought, the possibility of leaving the woman he was first united to for

another, a thing that is permitted by the Mosaic Law.

As in his first commandment against anger, we are advised to stifle the feeling in its birth – the advice being further exemplified by the comparison of the man delivered up to the judge – so here Christ says that fornication is the consequence of men and women looking at each other as objects of sexual lust; and, to avoid this, we must set aside all that can excite sexual lust; and, when once united to a woman, we must never leave her, under any pretext whatever, because this opens the door to sinful indulgence.

I was struck by the wisdom of the saying. It tends to do away with all the evils resulting from sexual relations. Men and women are to avoid all that can excite sensuality, being fully aware that nothing is more conducive to dissensions in the world than carnal pleasures, and knowing also that the law of nature is that the race should live together in couples, united in bonds that cannot be dissolved. In the Sermon on the Mount the words, ‘saving for the cause of fornication,’ which had always seemed strange to me, struck me still more forcibly when I saw that they were considered as permitting divorce if the wife had committed adultery.

Besides there being something unworthy in the very way the idea is expressed, and in this strange exception standing side by side with the most important principles that the sermon contained – like a regulation in some code – the exception itself was in direct opposition to the fundamental idea of Christ’s teaching.

I consulted the commentators of the gospels, and all of them (John Chrysostom, page 365), and even theological critics like Reuss, affirm that these words mean that Christ permits divorce if the wife has committed adultery; that in Christ’s prohibition of divorce, in Matthew 19:9, where we read ‘saving for the cause of fornication,’ the words have that meaning. I read the thirty-second verse over and over again, and came to the conclusion that this interpretation of the words was erroneous. In order to verify my opinion, I examined the context, and found, earlier in the chapter 19 of the gospel according to St. Matthew, in Mark 10, in Luke 16, and in the first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, a similar declaration of the indissolubility of the marriage tie, without exception of any kind.

In the gospel according to St. Luke 16:18, we read, 'Whoever puts away his wife, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is put away from her husband commits adultery.'

In the gospel according to St. Mark 10:4-12, we read, 'For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and the two of them shall be one flesh; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, do not let man put asunder.' And in the house His disciples asked Him again of the same matter. And he said to them, 'Whoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, commits adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she commits adultery.'

We find the same teaching in the gospel according to St. Matthew 19:4-8.

In the epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, 7:1-12, the statement that depravity may be prevented by husbands and wives never forsaking each other, nor defrauding each other for their rights, is enlarged upon; and it is distinctly said that neither shall the husband in any case forsake his wife for another woman, nor the wife leave her husband for another man.

Thus we see that, according to the gospels of Mark and Luke and the epistle of Paul, divorce is wholly forbidden. According to the interpretation that husband and wife are one flesh, joined together by God, which we find repeated in two of the gospels, divorce is forbidden. According to the sense of the whole teaching of Christ, who exhorts us to forgive all, not excluding the wife who has gone astray, it is forbidden. According to the sense of the whole text, which clearly points out that a man's leaving his wife brings depravity into the world, it is forbidden.

From where, then, is the conclusion drawn that a wife who has committed adultery may be divorced, and on what is it grounded? It is grounded on the very words of Matthew 5:32, which had so strangely struck me. It is alleged that these words prove that Christ permits divorce if the wife has committed adultery; and they are also repeated in the nineteenth chapter in numerous transcripts of the gospel, and by many of the Fathers of the Church, instead

of the words, 'except it be for fornication.'

I read the words over and over again, and it was long before I could understand them. I saw that there was probably something incorrect in the translation and interpretation, but could not for some time make out what it was. That there was a mistake was obvious. Placing his commandment in opposition to that of the Mosaic Law, which says that if a man hates his wife he may put her away, giving her a writing of divorcement, Christ says, 'But I say to you, that whoever puts away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery.' There is no opposition in these words, and no mention made of the possibility or impossibility of divorce. We are only told that he who puts away his wife causes her to commit adultery. And then comes a clause that excepts the wife guilty of adultery. This exception is altogether strange and unexpected; it is indeed absurd, as it destroys even the dubious sense of the words. It is stated that the putting away of a wife causes her to commit adultery, and then the husband is exhorted to put away his wife if she is guilty of adultery; as if the wife who was guilty of adultery would not commit adultery!

Moreover, on a closer examination of the text, I saw that it was even grammatically incorrect. It is said, 'Whoever puts away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery,' or, if we translate the word παρεψτος literally, 'besides fornication, causes her to commit adultery.' The words refer to the husband who causes his wife to commit adultery by putting her away. Then why is the clause 'cause of fornication' inserted? If it were said that the husband who puts away his wife, besides being guilty of fornication, commits adultery, the sentence would be grammatically correct. But as the text stands, the noun 'husband' has one predicate – 'causes her,' etc. – and how does the phrase 'saving for the cause of fornication' refer to it? 'Cannot cause her to commit adultery, saving for the cause of adultery?' Even if the words 'wife' or 'her' were added to the phrase 'saving for the cause of adultery', which is not the case, the words could have no reference to the predicate 'causes her.' According to the accepted interpretation, these words are considered as referring to the predicate 'puts away,' but the verb 'puts away' is not the predicate of the principal sentence, for that is 'causes to commit adultery.' Therefore, for what purpose are the words 'saving for (or besides) the cause of fornication'

inserted? Whether the wife is guilty of adultery or not, by putting her away the husband causes her to commit that sin.

The meaning of this sentence is similar to 'whoever deprives his son of food, except for the guilt of ruthlessness, gives him a reason to be ruthless'. This expression obviously cannot mean that the father can deprive his son of food if his son is ruthless. It can only mean that the father who deprives his son of food, beside his ruthlessness, also teaches his son to be ruthless. In the same way, the sentence would have a meaning if in the place of the word 'fornication' we found the words 'lasciviousness,' 'debauchery,' or some similar word expressing, not an action, but a character trait.

'Doesn't it mean,' I said to myself, 'that he who divorces his wife causes her to commit adultery, and is besides guilty of debauchery himself?' (For if a man divorces his wife, it is in order to take to himself some other woman.) If the word used in the text is found to mean 'debauchery,' then the sense will be clear.

And again, as in the preceding instances, the text confirmed my surmise in a manner that left no room for doubt.

What first struck me on reading the text was that the word πορνεία, which is, in all translations except the English, rendered as 'adultery' in the same way as μοιχασθαι, is, in reality, quite another word. Perhaps the two words are synonymous, or are used in the gospel in the same sense, I thought. So I referred both to the common dictionary and to the evangelical glossaries, and found that the word πορνεία, which is equivalent to the Hebrew 'zono' the Latin 'fornicatio,' the German 'Hurerei,' the Russian 'пачыстество' (lewdness), has its own definite meaning, and in no dictionary is it considered as signifying adultery; 'adultère,' 'Ehebruch,' as it has been translated by Luther. It properly implies a depraved state or disposition, and not an action, and cannot therefore be translated by the word 'adultery.' Moreover, I saw that the word 'adultery' is always expressed in the gospel, and even in the above-named verses, by another word, μοιχεύω. And no sooner had I corrected this evidently intentional perversion of the text than I saw that the sense given to the context of the nineteenth chapter, and by our commentators, was altogether impossible; I saw that there could be no doubt about the word πορνεία referring only to the husband.

Every Greek scholar will construe the passage thus: Παρεχτος (besides) λογου (the matter) πορνειας (of lewdness) ποιει (causes) αυτην (her) μοιχασθαι (to commit adultery). Therefore, the text stands word for word thus: 'He who divorces his wife, besides the sin of lewdness, causes her to commit adultery.'

We find exactly the same in the nineteenth chapter. No sooner is the incorrect translation of the word πορνεια amended, as well as that of the preposition επι, which has been translated 'for'; no sooner is the word 'lewdness' placed instead of 'adultery,' and the preposition 'by' instead of 'for'; than it grows perfectly clear that the words ει μη επι πορνεια can have no reference to the wife. And as the words παρεχτος λογου πορνειας can have no other meaning than 'besides the sin of lewdness of the husband,' so the words ει μη επι πορνεια, which we find in the nineteenth chapter, can have no reference to anything except the lewdness of the husband. It is said, ει μη επι πορνεια, which, being translated literally, is, 'if not by lewdness,' 'if not out of lewdness.' And thus the meaning is clear that Christ in this passage refutes the notion of the Pharisees that a man who put away his wife, not out of lewdness, but in order to live matrimonially with another woman, did not commit adultery; Christ says that the repudiation of a wife, even if it is not done out of lewdness, but in order to be joined in bonds of matrimony to another woman, is adultery. And thus the sense is simple, clear, perfectly consistent with the whole teaching, and both logically and grammatically correct.

It was with the greatest difficulty that I at last discovered this clear and simple meaning of the words themselves, and their harmony with the whole teaching of Christ. And, in truth, read the words in the German or French versions, where it is said, 'pour cause d'infidélité,' or 'à moins que cela ne soit pour cause d'infidélité,' and you will hardly be able to guess that the text has quite another meaning. The word παρεχτος, which according to all dictionaries means 'excepté,' 'ausgenommen,' is translated in the French by a whole sentence, 'à moins que cela ne soit.' The word πορνεια is translated 'infidélité,' 'Ehebruch,' 'adultery.' And on this intentional perversion of the text is based an interpretation that destroys the moral, religious, grammatical, and logical sense of Christ's words.

And once more I received a confirmation of the truth that the meaning of Christ's teaching is simple and clear. His commandments are definite, and of the highest practical importance; but the interpretations given to us, based on a desire to justify existing evils, have so obscured his teaching that we can with difficulty fathom its meaning. I felt convinced that had the gospel been found half burnt or half obliterated, it would have been easier to discover its true meaning than it is now; that it has suffered from such unconscientious interpretations, which have purposely concealed or distorted its true sense. In this last instance the special object of justifying the divorce of some Ivan the Terrible, which thus led to the misrepresentation of the Christian teaching of matrimony, is more obvious than in the preceding cases to which reference has been made.

No sooner are all these interpretations thrown aside than vagueness and mistiness fade away, and the second commandment of Christ rises plainly before us: 'Take no pleasure in concupiscence; let each man, if he is not a eunuch, have a wife, and each woman a husband; let a man have but one wife, and a woman one husband, and let them never under any pretext whatever dissolve their union.'

Immediately after the second commandment we find a new reference to the ancient law, and the third commandment is given. Matthew 5:33-37: 'Again, you have heard that it has been said to the people long ago, you shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord your oaths (Leviticus 19:12; Deuteronomy 23:21). But I say to you, do not swear at all; neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; neither by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Neither shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your word be yes, yes, or no, no; for whatever is more than these comes from evil.'

In my former readings of the gospel this text had always puzzled me. Not by its obscurity, as the text referring to divorce did; nor by its inconsistency with other passages, as did the text that forbids anger only if it is 'without a cause'; nor, again, by the difficulty of fulfilling the commandment, like the text that enjoins our letting ourselves be struck. It puzzled me, on the contrary, by its evident clarity and simplicity. Side by side with precepts, the

depth and importance of which filled me with awe, I found an apparently useless, insignificant precept, very easy of fulfillment, and comparatively unimportant in its bearing upon myself or upon others. I had never sworn by Jerusalem, or by God, or by anything; and had never found any difficulty in abstaining from doing so; besides, it seemed to me that my swearing or not swearing could be of no importance to anyone. And longing to find some explanation of a precept that puzzled me by its simplicity, I consulted the commentaries on the gospel. This once they helped me.

Commentators see in these words a confirmation of the third commandment of Moses, not to swear by God's name. They say that Christ, like Moses, forbids our taking God's name in vain. But they add besides that this precept given to us by Christ is not always obligatory, and that in no case does it refer to the oath of allegiance to the existing powers, which every citizen is obliged to take. They choose out texts from Holy Scripture, not with the purpose of confirming the direct meaning of Christ's precept, but in order to prove that it is possible and even necessary to leave it unfulfilled.

It is affirmed that Christ Himself sanctioned the taking of an oath in courts of law by his answer, 'You have said,' to the High Priest's words, 'I charge you under oath by the living God.' It is likewise affirmed that the apostle Paul called upon God to bear witness to the truth of his words, and that this was obviously an oath. It is affirmed that the Mosaic Law enjoined oaths, and that Christ did not abrogate them, and only set useless, pharisaically hypocritical oaths aside.

And when I saw the meaning and the true object of the interpretation, it grew clear to me that Christ's law against swearing was not as insignificant and easy of fulfillment as I had thought before I had come to regard the 'oath of allegiance' as one of those that are forbidden by Christ.

And I said to myself, 'Doesn't it mean that the oath, which is so carefully fenced round by the Church commentaries, is also forbidden? Don't Christ's words oppose the very oath without which the division of men into separate governments would be an impossibility – the oath without which a military class would be impossible?' Soldiers are those who act by violence and they call themselves 'sworn men' (присяга). Had I asked the grenadier I



mentioned in a preceding chapter how he solved the problem of the inconsistency between the gospel and the military code, he would have answered that he had taken an oath, i.e., sworn upon the gospel. All the military men I ever asked answered thus. Oaths are so essential in upholding the awful evils brought about by war and violence that in France, where Christ's teaching is entirely set aside, the oath of allegiance remains in full force. Indeed, had Christ not said, 'Do not swear at all,' he ought to have said so. He came to destroy evil, and how great is the evil brought about in the world by the taking of oaths! Perhaps some may urge that this was an imperceptible evil in Christ's time. No assumption can be more gratuitous. Epictetus and Seneca enjoined all men to take no oaths. In the laws of Manou the same precept may be found. Why should I say that Christ did not see this evil, when he speaks of it so definitely and so forcibly?

He says, 'I say to you, do not swear at all.' The saying is as clear, as simple, and as indubitable as the words, 'do not judge, do not condemn,' and it gives as little scope for false interpretation, the less so because the words 'Let your communication be yes, yes, or no, no; for whatever is more than these comes from evil,' are added.

Now if Christ by this teaching exhorts us always to fulfill the will of God, how dare a man swear to obey the will of another man? The will of God may not always coincide with the will of man. Christ tells us so in this very text. He says (verse 36), 'Do not swear by your head, for not only your head but every hair on it is subject to the will of God.'

We find the same thing taught in the epistle of James, who says (chapter 5, verse 12), 'But above all things, my brethren, do not swear, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath; but let your yes be yes, and your no be no, lest you fall into condemnation.' The apostle tells us why we are not to swear. Though the taking of an oath may be no sin in itself, he who swears falls into condemnation, and therefore shall no man swear. Can any language be clearer than the words of Christ and of this apostle?

But my ideas on this point were in so confused a state that for some time I went on asking myself, with surprise, 'Does the precept really mean this? How is it that all swear by the gospel? It cannot be.'

But I had read the commentaries on the gospel, and saw that what I deemed impossible had, nevertheless, been done. The same remark has to be made in reference to this as to the texts, 'Do not judge,' 'Do not give way to anger,' 'Never break the union of husband and wife.' We have set up our own institutions; we love them, and choose to consider them sacred. Christ, whom we acknowledge to be God, comes, and he says that our rules of life are bad. We acknowledge him to be God, yet we do not choose to set our rules of life aside. What is left then for us to do? When, by inserting the words 'without a cause,' we turn the commandment against anger into a meaningless sentence; when, like crafty lawyers, we interpret the sense of the commandment in a manner that gives it a contrary meaning to that designed by him who spoke it, as we do if, instead of prohibiting altogether the putting away of a wife, we declare divorce to be lawful and just, we put our institutions in the place of truth. But if it is impossible to interpret the words otherwise than as I have indicated, in the treatment of the precepts 'Do not judge,' 'Do not condemn,' 'Do not swear at all,' then we boldly act in direct opposition to Christ's teaching, while asserting that we strictly fulfill it, if we cleave to traditional interpretations. The chief obstacle to our understanding that the gospel wholly forbids our taking an oath is that the so-called Christian teachers boldly insist upon men's taking oaths upon the gospel; and in this acting contrary to the gospel.

How can it come into the head of a man who is made to take an oath on the gospel, or the crucifix, that that crucifix is sacred for the very reason that He who forbade our swearing was crucified upon it? He who takes the oath perhaps kisses the very passage that so clearly and definitely says, 'Do not swear at all.'

But such boldness no longer confounded me. I clearly saw that in the fifth chapter, verses 33-37, lay the third definite and practicable commandment of Christ, which may be stated: 'Never take an oath under any circumstances. Every oath is extorted from men for evil.'

After this third commandment stands a fourth reference to the Mosaic Law, and then the fourth commandment is presented. Matthew 5:38-42: 'You have heard that it has been said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, do not resist evil; but whoever shall strike you on your right

cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue you at law, and take away your coat, let him have your cloak also. And whoever shall compel you to go a mile, go two miles with him. Give to him who asks you, and from him who would borrow from you do not turn away.'

I have already spoken of the direct meaning of these words, and of our having no foundation whatever for interpreting them otherwise. The various commentaries upon them, from John Chrysostom to the present time, are truly surprising. We all admire the words, and each one tries to find some profound hidden meaning in them; but we usually fail to see that they mean exactly what they express. Ecclesiastical commentators, unmindful of the authority of him who they acknowledge as God, unhesitatingly limit the meaning of his words. They say, 'It is clearly understood that the precepts of long-suffering non-retaliation, being especially directed against the vindictiveness of the Jews, do not exclude either the right of setting limits to the progress of evil by the punishment of evil-doers, or private, individual endeavors to uphold the inviolability of truth, to amend the wicked, or to deprive evil-doers of the possibility of injuring others; the divine commandments of the Savior would otherwise be reduced to mere words, and would lead only to the progress of evil and the repression of virtue. The Christian's love should be like God's love; but since God's love limits and punishes evil only in proportion as it is more or less necessary for the glory of God or the salvation of our brethren, so is it the duty of those in authority to limit the progress of evil by punishments' (Exposition of the Gospel, by the Archim. Michael, based on the Commentaries of the Fathers of the Church).

Neither do learned and free-thinking Christians scruple to correct the sense of Christ's words. They affirm that his sayings are sublime, but impracticable; that the application of the precept of non-resistance would destroy the whole organization of life, which we have set up so well; such is the opinion of Renan, Strauss, and other free-thinking commentators.

Yet if we treat the words of Christ in the same way that we do the words of any man who may chance to speak to us, i.e., if we suppose that he says what he means, all profound interpretations will become unnecessary. Christ says, 'I find that the way you have regulated your lives is both foolish and

bad. I propose another way.’ And then he gives us his precepts in verses 38-42. Doesn’t it seem right that, before correcting these words, they should at least be understood? And this is just what none of us choose to do. We decide beforehand that the present organization of our lives, which his words tend to destroy, is the sacred law of mankind.

I had not considered our way of living as either good or sacred, and therefore I came to understand this commandment before I did the others. And when I understood these words exactly in the sense in which they were uttered, I was struck by their truth, clarity, and force. Christ says, ‘You think to destroy evil by evil. That is irrational. In order that there should be no evil, do no evil.’ And then, after enumerating all that is evil in our social adjustments, Christ exhorts us to act otherwise.

The fourth commandment, I have said, was the one that I understood first, and it opened up to me the true meaning of all the rest. The fourth clear, simple commandment, which it is within the power of all to obey, says, ‘Never resist evil by violence; never return violence for violence. If anyone strikes you, bear it; if anyone takes away what is yours, let him have it; if anyone makes you labor, do so; if anyone wants to have what you consider to be your own, give it up to him.’

And after this fourth commandment stands a fifth reference to the Mosaic Law, and the fifth commandment. Matthew 5:43-48: ‘You have heard that it has been said, “You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy (Leviticus 19:17-18).” But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven; for He makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Don’t even the publicans do the same? And if you salute your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Don’t even the heathens do so? Therefore be perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect.’

I had formerly considered these words as explaining, amplifying, and giving more emphasis to, even exaggerating, the teaching of non-resistance. But having already found the simple, definite, and applicable sense of each of

the preceding texts, which begin with a reference to the ancient law, I had a sense that I should find some fresh meaning here also. I had observed that a commandment was annexed to each reference to the ancient law, and that each verse of the commandment had its own significance, and could not be turned aside; and I was sure that would prove to be the fact here also. The last words that we repeated in the gospel according to St. Luke say that, as God makes no distinction between men, but pours down His blessings upon all, so should we be like our Father in heaven and make no distinction between men; not acting as the heathen do, but loving all men, and doing good to all. These words were very clear; they seemed to me an explanation and commendation to some clearly defined precept, but what that precept precisely was I could not for a long time make out.

‘Love one’s enemy.’ That sounded like something impossible. It was one of those beautiful utterances that cannot be considered otherwise than as presenting an unattainable moral ideal. It was either too much or it meant nothing. We may avoid wronging our enemy, but to love him is impossible. Christ cannot have commanded what we cannot fulfill. Moreover, the very first words in reference to the ancient law, ‘It has been said, Hate your enemy,’ were dubious. In the preceding passages Christ quotes the exact, authentic words of the Mosaic Law; but in this one he cites words that were never used. He seems to knowingly make a false statement about the ancient law.

The various commentaries on the gospel, which I consulted, helped me no more than they had done in my former doubts. All commentators acknowledge that the words ‘hate your enemy’ do not stand in the Mosaic Law; but by none of them is there any explanation of the incorrect quotation given. They tell us that it is hard to love one’s enemies – the wicked – and, commenting on Christ’s words, they add that though a man cannot love his enemy, yet he may neither wish him evil, nor actually wrong or injure him. It is persistently instilled into us that it is our obligation and duty to denounce evil-doers, i.e., to oppose our enemy; and the various steps are mentioned by which this virtue may be attained; and thus, according to the interpretation given by the Church, the final conclusion is that Christ, without any ostensible reason, quotes the words of the Mosaic Law incorrectly, and has uttered many beautiful sayings that are, in themselves,

useless and impracticable.

It seemed to me that this could not be a true statement of the case. I felt sure that there was as clear and definite a sense in these words as I had found in the first four commandments. In order to comprehend the real meaning of the text, I endeavored, first of all, to take in the sense of the incorrect reference to the Mosaic Law, 'You have been told, hate your enemy.' It is not without some distinct purpose that, before giving each of His own precepts, Christ quotes the words of the old law, 'You shall not kill,' 'You shall not commit adultery,' etc., and places his teaching in opposition to them. Now, if we do not comprehend what meaning Christ attached to the words he quotes, neither can we comprehend the duty that he enjoins. It seemed to me that the first point it was necessary to make out was for what purpose Christ had cited words that are not found in the Mosaic Law. Here we find two precepts set in opposition to each other: 'You have been told, you shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.' It is obvious that the basis of the new commandment must be the very difference between these two precepts of the ancient law. In order to see the distinction more clearly, I asked myself, 'What do the words "neighbor" and "enemy" mean, in the language of the gospel?' And on consulting the dictionary and other passages of the Bible, I found that the word 'neighbor' in the Hebrew language always signifies 'a Jew.' In the gospel, a similar definition of the word 'neighbor' is given in the parable of the Good Samaritan. According to the Jewish lawyer's question, 'Who is my neighbor,' a Samaritan could not be his neighbor. The same definition of the word 'neighbor' is given in the Acts of the Apostles, 7:27. The word 'neighbor,' as used in the gospel, signifies a 'fellow- countryman,' one who belongs to the same nation. And I hence concluded that the antithesis used by Christ in this passage, when quoting the words of the law, 'You have been told, you shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy,' places a 'fellow-countryman' in opposition to 'a stranger.' I then asked myself what the word 'enemy' meant, according to the Hebrews. It is almost always used, in the gospel, in the sense, not of a private, but a common enemy – a national enemy (Luke 1:71, Matthew 22:44, Mark 12:36, Luke 20:43, and elsewhere). The use of the word 'enemy' in the singular number, in the text, 'hate your enemy,' made it clear to me that the words referred to a national enemy. The singular expresses an

enemy taken in a collective sense. In the Old Testament the word 'enemy,' when used in the singular, always implies a national enemy.

No sooner did I comprehend this than my difficulty in understanding how it was that Christ, who always quoted the original words of the law, in this instance inserts the words, 'You have been told, You shall hate your enemy,' which are not in the Mosaic Law, was solved. To remove all doubts as to the meaning of the passage, we have only to take the word 'neighbor' as meaning a 'fellow-countryman.' Christ speaks of the Mosaic regulations concerning a national enemy. He combines in the single expression 'to hate, to wrong an enemy,' all the various precepts dispersed through the scriptures by which the Jews are enjoined to oppress, kill, and destroy other nations. And he says, 'You have been told that you shall love your own people, and hate the enemies of your nation; but I say to you, that you love all, without distinction of their nationality.' And no sooner had I understood this than the second and chief difficulty, i.e., how the words 'love your enemies' were to be understood, was removed. It is impossible to love our personal enemies. But we can love men of another nation as we do those of our own people. I saw clearly that by the words, 'You have heard that it has been said, love your neighbor, and hate your enemy; but I say to you, Love your enemies,' Christ asserts that all men are accustomed to consider their fellow-countrymen as their neighbors and men of other nations as their enemies, and this he forbids our doing. He says that, according to the Law of Moses, a distinction was made between him who was a Jew and him who was not, but was considered as a national enemy; and then he commands that no such distinction should be made between them. Indeed, in the gospels according to St. Matthew and St. Luke we find that, immediately after this precept, he says that all are equal before God, that the same sun shines on all, and that the same rain falls upon all. God makes no distinction between men, and does equal good to all; ought not men to do likewise, without recognizing distinctions of nationality?

Thus I again found ample confirmation of the simple and practicable sense of Christ's words. Instead of an indistinct and indefinite philosophy, I discovered a clear, definite precept, which all have it within their power to fulfill. To make no distinction between one's own and other nations, and so to avoid the natural results of these distinctions, such as being at enmity

with other nations, going to war, taking part in war, arming for war, etc., and to treat all men, whatever nation they belong to, as we do our fellow-countrymen, was the requirement of Christ.

All this was so simple and so clear that I was surprised I had not understood it at once.

The hindrance in my way was the same that had prevented my comprehending the prohibition of courts of law and oaths. It is difficult to conceive that the very courts of law, which are inaugurated with Christian prayer, and consecrated by those who regard themselves as the fulfillers of Christ's law, are incompatible with the Christian faith, and are in direct opposition to Christ's teaching. Nor is it easier to conceive that the oath of allegiance, which all men are made to take by the keepers of Christ's law, is expressly forbidden by that very law. And it is hardest of all to conceive that, to uphold what is considered not only as necessary and natural, but even grand and glorious, as love of one's native land – its defense, its aggrandizement, war against an enemy, and so on – is not only sinning against the law of Christ, but even abjuring it. We have become so estranged from the teaching of Christ that this very estrangement is now the chief obstacle to our understanding it. We have turned a deaf ear to his words, and forgotten all He taught us of the life we are to lead; how that we should not kill, nor even bear malice against a fellow-creature; that we should never defend ourselves, but turn our cheeks to be struck; that we should love our neighbor, etc. We have grown so used to calling the men who devote their lives to murder 'a Christ-loving army'; who put up prayers to Christ for victory over the enemy; whose pride and glory are in murder; and who have raised the symbol of murder, i.e., the sword, into something almost sacred, so that he who is deprived of that symbol is considered as having been disgraced; we have grown so used to all this, I repeat, that it now appears to us that Christ did not forbid war; and that, if he had intended to do so, he would have expressed his meaning more clearly.

We forget that Christ could never have thought it possible that men who believe in his teaching of humility, love, and universal brotherhood would calmly and consciously institute the murder of their brethren.

Christ cannot have supposed it possible, and therefore he could no more



have forbidden a Christian to make war, than could a father, while admonishing his son to live honestly, without injuring or defrauding others, exhort him not to cut men's throats on the high road.

Not one of the apostles, not one of Christ's disciples, could have supposed it necessary to forbid a Christian's committing murder, which is misnamed war. See what Origen says in his answer to Celsus, chapter 63.

'Celsus exhorts you to help the sovereign with all your strength, to take part in his duties, to take up arms for him, to serve under his banner, if necessary to lead out his army to battle. Moreover, we may say, in answer to those who, being ignorant of our faith, require of us the murder of men, that even their high priests do not soil their hands in order that their god may accept their sacrifice. No more do we.' And concluding by the explanation that Christians do more good by their peaceful lives than soldiers do, Origen says, 'Thus we fight better than any for the safety of our sovereign. We do not, it is true, serve under his banners, and we should not, even were he to force us to do so.'

It was thus that the first Christians regarded war and thus their teacher spoke when addressing the great men of this world, at the time when hundreds and thousands of martyrs were perishing for the Christian faith.

But in our times the question whether a Christian ought to take part in war never seems to occur to any. Youths brought up according to the Church law, which is called the Christian law, go every autumn, at fixed periods, to the conscription halls, and, with the assistance of their spiritual pastors, there renounce the law of Christ. A short time ago a peasant refused to enter the military service, grounding his refusal on the words of the gospel. The clergy all tried to persuade the man that his view of the matter was erroneous; and as the peasant still believed in Christ's words, and not in theirs, he was cast into prison, and kept there until he denied Christ. And this takes place although we, Christians, received 1800 years ago a perfectly clear and definite commandment from our God, which said, 'Never consider men of another nation as your enemies; look upon all men as brethren, and behave toward all men as you do toward your fellow-countrymen; therefore you shall not kill those whom you call your enemies; love all and do good to all.'

And when I had understood these simple, definite commandments, which admit of no other interpretation, I asked myself, 'What would the world be if all Christians believed that these commandments must be fulfilled in order to attain happiness, instead of treating them only as commandments that must be sung or read in churches, in order that we may find favor in the eyes of God? What would the world be if people did but as firmly believe in the obligatory character of these commandments as they now do in the necessity of daily prayer; of attending public worship every Sunday; of fasting on Fridays, and receiving communion every year? What would the world be, if all men did but as firmly believe in these commandments as they do in the prescribed rules of the Church?' And I pictured to myself men and women, in Christian society, living up to these commandments, and instilling the same into new generations; ourselves and our children no longer taught, both by word and deed, that man must maintain his own dignity, must defend his own rights (which cannot be done without humbling or offending others), but, instead, taught that no man has any rights, that none can be superior or inferior to another, that only he who tries to rise above all others is lower and more degraded than others, that there is no feeling more debasing for a man to cherish than that of anger against another, that the seeming insignificance or foolishness of a man can never justify either anger or enmity. Instead of our present social adjustments – from the show-glasses of shops to theatres, novels, and millinery – whose tendency is but to sensuality, I pictured to myself that we, and our children, were taught, by word and deed, that the pleasures of sensational books, theatres, and balls was the basest kind of pleasure; that every action whose aim was the embellishing or showing-off of our persons was base and disgusting. Instead of our present social adjustments, by which it is considered necessary, and even in a sense right, that a young man should 'sow his wild oats' before marriage, instead of a life in which separation between husband and wife is regarded as an ordinary thing, instead of the acknowledged necessity for the existence of a class of women who serve to pamper depravity, instead of the permission and authorization of divorce, I pictured to myself that we were taught, both by precept and by example, that a single, unmarried state, for a man in all his virility, was an anomaly and a shame, that a man's leaving the woman he was united to, or taking another in her place, was not only as unnatural a proceeding as incest, but a cruel and inhuman deed. Instead of

our lives being based upon violence, instead of each of us being either chastened himself or chastising others from childhood to old age, I pictured to myself that we were taught, both by precept and by example, that vengeance is but a base instinct; that violence is not only shameful, but deprives man of his true happiness; that the proper joys of life are only those that need no violence to protect them; that it is not he who despoils others, or keeps what is his own out of the hands of others, and makes others serve him, who is the most deserving of respect, but, rather, he who gives most, and who helps others most. Instead of considering it very right and lawful that each man should take an oath, and thus give away the most precious of his possessions, i.e., his whole life into the keeping of another, I pictured to myself that we were taught to regard the intelligent will of man as that 'holiest of holies' which no man can ever give away; and that to promise anything with an oath is to renounce one's own rational self, and is an outrage against all that is most holy in man. I pictured to myself that instead of the enmity toward other nations that is instilled into us under a semblance of patriotism, instead of the praise of murder or war, which we, from our childhood, look upon as a glorious thing, there was instilled into us the dread and scorn of all those diplomatic or military institutions that serve to disunite men; that to admit the existence of states, laws, frontiers, countries, etc., is but a proof of the most brutal ignorance; that to go to war, i.e., to kill men who are complete strangers to us, with out any reason, is the most horrid crime, of which only a lost and depraved man, degraded to the rank of a wild beast, is capable. I pictured to myself that all men believed in this, and I asked myself, 'What would the world be then?'

Formerly I had more than once asked myself what the fulfillment of the teaching of Christ, as I then understood it, would lead to, and the involuntary answer had been, 'To nothing at all.' We shall all go on praying, receiving the Holy Sacrament, believing in our redemption and salvation, in the redemption and salvation of the whole world through Christ, and still this salvation will not be brought about by ourselves; but Christ will come again, in His appointed time, to judge the living and the dead, and then the kingdom of God will be established on earth, independently of the life that we have led. But the teaching of Christ, as I now understand it, has another signification: the establishing of the kingdom of God on earth depends upon

us. The fulfillment of Christ's teaching, as expressed in the five commandments, establishes this kingdom of God. The kingdom of God on earth is peace among all men. Peace among men is the highest earthly bliss that man can attain. It was thus that the Jewish prophets pictured the kingdom of God to themselves. And it is thus that each human heart ever has and ever will picture it.

The substance of the entire teaching of Christ is the establishing of the kingdom of God on earth, and that brings peace to all men. In the Sermon on the Mount, in his conversation with Nicodemus, in the mission he gave to the disciples, in all his teachings, he speaks of what causes division among men and prevents their living in peace and entering the kingdom of God. All Christ's parables are definitions of the kingdom of God – they all seek to instill into us that it is only by loving our brethren, and being at peace with them, that we can enter the kingdom. John the Baptist, the precursor of Christ, says that the kingdom of God is at hand, and that Jesus Christ will give it to the world.

Christ says that he brings peace on earth (John 14:27); 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; I give it to you not as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.'

These five commandments of Christ do indeed give peace to men. The purpose of all the five commandments is to procure peace among men. Let men but believe in the teaching of Christ, and obey it, and there will be peace on earth; not the peace established by man, which is fleeing and transitory, but general, inviolable, eternal peace.

The first commandment says: Be at peace with all men and do not consider any man as worthless or foolish (Matt. 5:22). If peace has been destroyed, use your utmost endeavors to re-establish it. The service of God is the annihilation of all enmity (Matt. 5:23-24). Let the least disagreement be followed by immediate reconciliation, lest you swerve from the true life. This commandment includes all in itself. But Christ foresees the temptations of the world that destroy peace among men, and gives a second commandment against the seductions of sexual relations that destroy peace: Do not consider carnal beauty to lust after it. Avoid the temptation (Matt. 5:28,30); let each man have one wife, and each woman one husband;

and let them never leave each other, under any pretext whatever (Matt. 5:23). Another temptation is the taking of oaths, for it leads men into sin. Know, therefore, that to do so is to sin, and consequently never make any vow (Matt. 5:34,35). The third temptation is to vengeance, which is called human justice. Never take vengeance on any man, nor seek to excuse yourself by saying you have received injury at the hands of another; bear the wrong done to you, and do not return evil for evil (Matt. 5:38,42). The fourth temptation arises from the distinction made between nations, the enmity between races and states. Know that all men are brethren, and sons of the same God, and never destroy peace in the name of national interests (Matt. 5:43,48). Let men leave but one of these commandments unfulfilled, and peace will be destroyed. Let men fulfill all these commandments and the kingdom of peace will be established on earth. These commandments eliminate all evil from the life of people.

The fulfillment of Christ's commandments will make the lives of men such as what each human heart seeks and longs for. All men will be brethren, each will be at peace with the other, and each will be free to enjoy all the blessings of this world during the term of life allotted to him by God. Men will turn their 'swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks.' And on earth will be established the kingdom of God; the kingdom of peace that was promised by the prophets, which drew nearer with John the Baptist, and which Christ announced in the words of Isaiah, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind; to set at liberty those who are bruised, and to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.'

The simple and clear commandments of peace, given by Christ, by which all causes of dissension are foreseen and turned aside, reveal the kingdom of God on earth to men. Thus Christ is truly the Messiah. He has fulfilled the promised. Only we do not fulfill what people always wished for – what we were praying for and continue to pray for.

## Chapter 7

Why does man not do the things that Christ enjoins and that can give him the highest earthly felicity – the felicity he has ever longed to attain? The answer as usually given, with slight variations of expression, is that the teaching of Christ is indeed sublime, and its fulfillment would establish the kingdom of God on earth, but it is difficult and therefore impracticable.

The teaching of Christ, which is about how people must live, is divine, good and promises blessing to people, but it is difficult for people to follow it. We repeat this, and hear this, from others so often that we no longer see controversy in these words.

It is in the nature of man to strive after what is best. Each teaching of life is but a teaching of what is best for man. If men have pointed out to them what is really best for them, how do they come to answer that they wish to do what is best, but cannot?

Human intellect, ever since man has existed, has been directed toward discovering what is best among all the demands that are made both in individual and in social life.

Men struggle for land, for any object that they may want, and then end by dividing all among themselves, each calling what he may get his 'personal property.' They find that though difficult of adjustment, it is better arranged thus, and they keep to their own property. Men fight to get wives for themselves, and then come to the conclusion that it is better for each to have his own family; and though it may be hard to maintain a family, men keep to their property, their families, and all else they are said to possess. No sooner do men find it best for themselves to act in a particular way, than they proceed to act in that way, however hard it may be. Then what do we mean by saying the teaching of Christ is sublime, a life in accordance with his teaching would be a better one than the one we now lead, but we cannot lead the life that would be best for us because it is hard to do so?

If 'hard' means that it is hard to give up the momentary satisfaction of our desires for some great and good end, why do we not say, as well, that it is hard to plough the ground in order to have bread; to plant apple trees in order to have apples? Every being endowed with the least germ of reason

knows that no great good can be attained without trouble and difficulty. And now we say that though Christ's teaching is sublime, we can never put it into practice because it is hard to do so. Hard, because its observance would deprive us of what we have always possessed. Have we never heard that it may be better for us to suffer and to lose, than never to suffer and always to have our desires satisfied?

Man may be but an animal, and nobody will find fault with him for being such; but a man cannot reason that he chooses to be only an animal; no sooner does he reason than he admits himself to be a rational being, and, making this admission, he cannot help recognizing a distinction between what is rational and what is irrational. Reason does not command, it only enlightens.

While groping about in the darkness in search of the door, I bruise my hands and knees. A man comes with a light, and I see the door. I can no longer bruise myself against the wall now that I see the door, still less can I assert that, though I see the door and feel convinced the best plan would be to enter it, it is hard to do so, and I prefer bruising my knees against the wall.

There must evidently be some strange misconception in the argument that the teaching of Christ is good, and conducive to good to the world, but man is weak, man is bad, and, while wishing to act for the best, he acts for the worst, and therefore he cannot do what he know is best for himself.

This notion must be the result of some false assumption.

It is only by assuming that what is, is not, and that what is not, is, that man can have arrived at so strange a negation of the possibility of fulfilling a teaching that, as he himself admits, would give him happiness.

The assumption that has brought mankind to accept this notion is based on the dogmatic Christian creed – the creed that is taught to all members of the Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant Churches from their earliest childhood.

This creed, according to the definition given by believers, is an acknowledgement of the existence of things that seem to be (a definition given by St. Paul and repeated in works on divinity and catechisms as the

best definition of faith). It is this belief that has brought mankind to the singular conviction that the teaching of Christ is good, but cannot be put in practice.

The teaching of this creed is literally as follows: God eternal, Three Persons in one God, chose to create a world of spirits. The bountiful God created that world of spirits for their happiness; but it chanced that one of the spirits grew wicked, and therefore unhappy. Some time passed away, and God created another world, a material world, and created man, likewise for happiness. God created man happy, immortal, and sinless. Man was happy because he enjoyed all the blessings of life without labor; immortal, for he was always to live thus; sinless, for he did not know evil.

Man was tempted in Eden by the spirit of the first creation who had grown wicked; and from that time man fell, and other fallen men like him were born into the world; men labored, sickened, suffered, died, and struggled morally and physically; i.e., the imaginary man became the real man, such as we know him to be; and we have no grounds for imagining him ever to have been otherwise. The state of man who labors, suffers, strives after good, avoids evil, and dies; this state, which is real, and beyond which we can imagine no other, is not the true state of man, according to this orthodox belief, but it is a temporary, accidental state, unnatural to him.

And though, according to this teaching, this state of man has continued for all men from the expulsion of Adam out of Eden, i.e., from the beginning of the world to the birth of Christ, and has continued in the same way since that time, believers are bound to think that this is only an accidental, temporary state. According to this teaching the Son of God, God Himself, the Second Person of the Trinity, was sent down from heaven by God, and was made man, to save men from this accidental, temporary state, unnatural to them, to deliver them from the curse laid upon them by the same God for the sin of Adam, and to re-establish them in their former natural state of perfect happiness, i.e., of health, immortality, innocence, and idleness. According to this teaching, again, the Second Person of the Trinity redeemed the sin of Adam by the fact that men crucified Him, and thus put an end to the unnatural state of man, which has lasted from the beginning of the world. And from that time man believed in Christ, and became again such as



he was before the fall, immortal, healthy, sinless, and idle.

The orthodox teaching does not dwell at any length upon the consequent results of the redemption, according to which, after the death of Christ, the earth should have begun to yield up her fruits to believers without labor, sickness should have ceased, and mothers should have given birth to their offspring without suffering; for, however great their faith is, it is difficult to instill into those who find labor hard, and sickness painful, that labor is not hard, and suffering is not painful. Great stress, however, is laid on that part of the teaching that says that 'death and sin are no more.'

It is confidently asserted that the dead live. And, as the dead cannot possibly tell us whether they are dead or alive, any more than a stone can tell whether it can speak or not, this absence of all denial is taken as a proof of the assertion that those who are dead are not dead. And with yet greater solemnity and assurance is it asserted that, after the coming of Christ on earth, man is delivered from sin by his faith in Him, i.e., that man has no need of reason to enlighten his path in life, and has no need to strive after what is best for himself; he only has to believe that Christ redeemed him from sin to become sinless, i.e., perfectly good. Thus, according to this teaching, men must think their intellect impotent, and that therefore they are sinless, i.e., cannot err.

The true believer must fancy that ever since Christ came into the world, the earth yields fruit without labor; that children are brought into the world without suffering; that there is no sickness, no death, no sin – i.e., no errors. He must imagine that what is not, is, and what is, is not.

Such is the teaching of our strictly logical theory of theology. This teaching seems innocent in itself. But a deviation from truth can never be innocent; it entails consequences, more or less important, according to the importance of the subject of the untruth. In this case the subject of the untruth is the whole life of man.

This teaching calls an individual blissful, sinless; and eternal life the true life, i.e., a life that nobody has ever seen, and that does not exist. And the life that is, the only one we know, which we lead, and which mankind has ever led, is, according to this teaching, a fallen, wicked life.

The battle between the intellectual and animal nature of man, which lies in the soul of each, and is the substance of the life of each man, is entirely set aside. The struggle is made to refer to what befell Adam at the creation of the world. And the question, 'Am I to eat the apples that tempt me?' according to this teaching, no longer applies to man. Adam solved the question in the negative, once and forever, in the garden. Adam sinned, that is, Adam erred, and we all fell irrevocably, and all our endeavors to live rationally are useless, and even godless. I am irrevocably bad, and I must know it. My salvation does not lie in the fact that I can order my life by my reason, and, having learned to know good from evil, do what is best. No, Adam sinned once for all, and Christ has, once and for ever, set the evil right; and all that is left for me to do is to mourn over the fall of Adam, and rejoice in my salvation through Christ.

According to this teaching, not only are the loves of good and truth, which are innate in man, his endeavors to enlighten by his reason the various phenomena of life, and his spiritual life deemed unimportant, but they are all vainglory and pride.

Our life here on earth, with all its joys, with all its charms, with all its struggles between light and darkness, the lives of all those who lived before, my own life with its inward struggles and consequent victories of reason, is not the true life, but a hopelessly spoiled, fallen life; the true life, the sinless life, according to this teaching, lies only in faith, i.e., in fancy, i.e., in madness.

Let a man but set aside the teaching he has imbibed from his childhood, let him transfer himself in thought into a new man, not brought up in that teaching, and then let him imagine in what light this teaching would appear to him. Would he not deem it complete insanity?

Strange and awful though it was to think thus, I was forced to admit that it was even so, for only thus could I explain to myself the strikingly inconsistent, senseless arguments, which I heard all around me, against the possibility of fulfilling the teaching of Christ. 'It is good and would lead to happiness, but men cannot fulfill it.'

It is only the assumption that what does not exist, exists, and what exists,

does not exist, that can have brought mankind to so surprising an inconsistency. And I found that false assumption in the so-called Christian faith, which has been preached during 1800 years.

Believers are not the only persons who say that the teaching of Christ is good, but impracticable. Unbelievers, men who either do not believe, or think that they do not believe, in the dogmas of the fall and the redemption, say the same. Men of science, philosophers, and men of cultivated minds in general, who consider themselves perfectly free from superstition, likewise argue the impracticability of Christ's teaching. They do not believe, or at least think that they do not believe, in anything, and therefore consider themselves as having nothing to do with superstition, with the fall of man, or with redemption. I thought so too, formerly. I also thought that these learned men had other grounds for denying the practicability of the teaching of Christ. But, on closer examination of the basis of their negation, I clearly saw that unbelievers had the same false idea, that life is not what it is, but what it seems to be; and that this idea has the same basis as the idea of believers. Men who call themselves 'unbelievers' do not, it is true, believe in God, in Christ, or in Adam; but they believe in the fundamental false assumption of the right of man to a life of perfect bliss, just as firmly as theologians do.

However privileged science, with her philosophy, may boast of being the judge and the guide of intellect, she is, in reality, not its guide, but its slave. The view taken of the world is always prepared for her by religion; and science only works in the path assigned her by religion. Religion reveals the meaning of life, and science applies this meaning to the various phases of life. And, therefore, if religion gives a false meaning to life, science, reared in this religious creed, will apply this false meaning to the life of man.

The teaching of the church gave, as the basis of life, the right of man to perfect bliss – bliss that is to be attained, not by the individual efforts of man, but by something beyond his own control; and this view of human life became the basis of our European science and philosophy.

Religion, science, and public opinion all unanimously tell us that the life we lead is a bad one, but that the teaching, which teaches us to endeavor to improve, and thus make our life itself better, is impracticable.

The teaching of Christ, as an improvement of human life by the rational efforts of man, is impracticable because Adam sinned and the world is full of evil, says religion.

Philosophy says that Christ's teaching is impracticable because certain laws, which are independent of the will of man, govern human life. Philosophy and science say, in other words, exactly the same as religion does in its dogmas of original sin and redemption.

In the teaching of redemption there are two fundamental theses on which all is grounded: (1) man has a right to perfect bliss, but the life of this world is a bad one and cannot be amended by the efforts of man, and (2) we can only be saved by faith.

These two theses have become first truths, both for the believers and the unbelievers of our so-called Christian Society. Out of the second thesis arose the Church, with its institutions. Out of the first arose our social opinions, and our philosophical and political theories.

All the political and philosophical theories that justify existing order, Hegelism and its offspring, are based on this thesis. Pessimism, which expects of life what it cannot give, and therefore denies life, is but the result of the same thesis.

Materialism, with its strange enthusiastic assertion that man is but a process, is the lawful child of this teaching, which acknowledges that the life here below is a fallen life. Spiritism, with its learned partisans, is the best proof that scientific and philosophical views are not free, but are based on the principle, inculcated by religion, that a blissful eternal life is natural to man.

This erroneous idea of the meaning of life has perverted the whole activity of man. The dogma of the fall and of the redemption of man has closed the most important and lawful domain of man's activity to him, and has excluded from the whole sphere of human knowledge the knowledge of what man must do to be happier and better. Science and philosophy fancy themselves the adversaries of so-called Christianity, and pride themselves upon the fact, while they, in reality, work for it. Science and philosophy address everything except the one important point: how man is to improve

his condition and lead a better life. The teaching of morality, called ethics, has quite disappeared from our so-called Christian society.

Neither believers nor unbelievers ask themselves how we ought to live, and how we must use the reason that is given to us; but they ask themselves, 'Why is our life here not such as we fancied it to be, and when will it be such as we wish it to be?'

It is only through the influence of this false teaching, engrained in the minds of our generations, that we can explain how it is, just like man spitted out that apple of knowledge of good and evil that he ate in the Paradise according to the scripture, that man has forgotten that his whole history is but an endeavor to solve the contradictions between his rational and animal nature. Instead, he began to use all his wits to search for the historical laws of only his animal nature.

The religious and philosophical teachings of all nations (except the philosophical teachings of the so-called Christian world), Judaism, Buddhism, Brahmanism, the teaching of Confucius, and of the sages of ancient Greece have but one purpose in view – the regulation of life, and the solution of the problem of how man must strive to improve his condition and lead a better life. The teaching of Confucius deals with personal improvement; Judaism consists of man's following the covenant made with God, and Buddhism teaches each how to escape the evils of life. Socrates taught personal improvement in the name of reason. The Stoics acknowledge rational liberty as the sole basis of the true life.

The rational activity of man has always lain in enlightening, by reason, his striving after good. Free will, says philosophy, is an illusion; and it prides itself on the audacity of the assertion. But free will is not only an illusion; it is a word that has really no meaning. It is a word invented by theologians and legislators; and to try to disprove its existence is but wrestling with a windmill. Reason, which enlightens our life and forces us to modify our actions, is not an illusion, and cannot possibly be explained away. The following after reason in order to attain happiness was a teaching taught to mankind by all true teachers, and in it lies the whole teaching of Christ.

The teaching of Christ concerns the human son that is common to all people,

i.e., it concerns the striving of all men after good; and it concerns human reason, which enlightens man in his search. (To prove that 'the human son' signifies the son of man is superfluous. In order to consider the words, 'the human son' as having any other meaning, it would be necessary to prove that Christ purposely used words that have another meaning to express what he wished to say. But even if, according to the positive teaching of the Church, the words, 'the human son,' signify 'the son of God,' the words, 'the human son,' still signify man, for Christ calls all men 'the sons of God.')

The teaching of Christ concerning the human son - the son of God, which is the basis of the whole gospel, is expressed in the clearest manner in his conversation with Nicodemus. 'Every man,' he says, 'in addition to his consciousness of an individual life, through his human parents, must admit that his birth is from above' (John 3:5-7). That which man acknowledges in himself as being free, is just what is born of the Eternal Being, of Him Whom we call God. This son of God in man, born of God, is what we must exalt in ourselves in order to obtain the true life. The human son is the begotten son of God (not singly-begotten). He who exalts in himself the son of God over all the rest that is in him, he who believes that life is in himself alone, will not find himself in contradiction with life. The contradiction only results from men not believing in the light that is in them; the light of which John the Evangelist speaks when he says, 'In him is life, and the life is the light of men.'

Christ teaches us to exalt above all else the human son, who is the son of God and the light of men. He says, 'When you lift up the human son, you will know that I do not speak of myself' (John 8:28). The Jews do not understand his words, and they ask, 'The human son must be lifted up. Who is this human son?' (John 12:34). He answers thus (John 12:35): 'Yet a little while is the light in you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness come upon you; for he who walks in darkness does not know where he goes.' On being questioned what the words, 'Lift up the human son' signify, Christ answers, 'To live according to the light that is in people.'

The human son, according to the answer given by Christ, is the light in which man must walk while the light is in them.

Luke 11:35: 'Take heed that the light that is in you is not darkness.'

Matt. 6:23: 'If the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness?' Christ speaks thus to all people.

Both before Christ and after him people have said the same: that there lives in man a divine light, sent down from heaven, and that light is 'reason,' and each must follow that light alone, seeking for good by its aid alone. This has been said by the Brahmin teachers, by the Hebrew prophets, by Confucius, Socrates, Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus, and by all truly wise men who were not compilers of philosophical theories, but who sought the truth for their own good and that of all men.

And now, according to the dogma of the redemption, we find that it is altogether unnecessary to think or speak of that light in man. Believers say it is necessary to consider the nature of each person of the Trinity, and which of the sacraments must be observed; for the salvation of man will come, not of his own efforts, but through the Trinity, and by a regular observance of the sacraments. We must consider, say unbelievers, by what laws the infinitesimal particle of substance moves in the endless expanse of endless time; but it is not necessary to consider what reason requires of man for his own good, because the improvement of his state will not proceed from his own efforts, but from the general laws that we shall discover.

I am persuaded that, in a few centuries, the history of the so-called scientific activity in Europe during these latter ages will form an inexhaustible subject of laughter and pity for still later generations, who will report somewhat in this style: 'During several centuries the learned men of the small Western part of the great hemisphere were in a state of epidemic insanity, fancying that a life of eternal bliss was to be theirs; and were plunged in laborious studies of all kinds as to how, and according to what laws, that life was to begin for them, meanwhile doing nothing themselves, and never thinking of improving themselves.' And still more touching will this seem to the future historian when he finds that these men had a teacher who clearly and definitely explained to them what they were to do in order to be happier, but that the teacher's words were taken by some to mean that he would come in a cloud to set all right, while others said that the words of the teacher were perfect, but impracticable; for human life was not such as they wished it to be, and was not worth caring about; that human intellect was to

be directed toward a study of the laws of this life, without any reference to the good of man.

The Church says that the teaching of Christ is impracticable, because life here is but a suggestion of the true life; it cannot be good – it is all evil. The best way to live this life is to despise it, and to live by faith, i.e., by fancy, in a future life of eternal bliss; and to live the current life the way it goes, and pray.

Philosophy, science, and public opinion say that the teaching of Christ is impracticable because the life of man does not depend on the light of reason by which he can enlighten his life, but on general laws; and that there is no need to enlighten life by our reason or to seek to be guided by reason, for we must live as we can, firmly believing that, according to the laws of historical and sociological progress, after we have lived badly for a very long time, our life will grow very good of itself.

People come to a farm, and find all they want there; a house with all necessary utensils, barns full of corn, cellars full of all kinds of provisions; in the yard are implements of husbandry, tools, harnesses, horses, cows, and sheep – in a word, all that is necessary for living contentedly. People crowd in and begin to use what they find, each mindful of himself alone, never thinking of leaving anything either for those who are with him in the house, or for those who are to come after him. Each wishes to have all for himself. Each hastens to take as much as he can, and consequent destruction of everything ensues; all are struggling, fighting to possess the property themselves; milk cows and unshorn sheep about to kid are killed for meat; the ovens are heated with benches and carts; the men fight for milk and for corn; and thus spill, spoil, and waste more than they use. Not one of them can eat a morsel in peace, each is snarling at his neighbor; a stronger man comes and takes possession of all, and he is despoiled in his turn.

At last these men, all bruised and exhausted with fighting and hunger, leave the farm. The master again makes the farm ready so that men may live there in peace. Again plenty fills the yard, and again passers-by come in, and the struggling and fighting are renewed; all is wasted once more, and the worn-out, bruised, and angry men again leave the farm, abusing and hating their companions and the master too, for having so sparingly and so poorly



provided for them. Once again the good master gets the farm ready, and the struggling returns over and over again. Now, one day, among the new comers there appears a teacher who says, 'Brethren, we are all wrong. See what plenty there is here; see how carefully all is provided. There will be enough, not only for us, but also for those who come after us, if we simply live wisely. Let us not despoil, but rather let us help each other. Let us sow, plough, and breed cattle, and it will be well for us all.' And it happened that some understood what the teacher said, and they followed his advice; they ceased fighting and robbing each other, and they set to work. But some had not heard the teacher's words, and others had heard, but did not believe him, and they did not do what he enjoined, but continued to fight as before, and, after wasting the master's property, they too left the farm. Those who obeyed the teacher said, 'Do not fight, do not waste the master's property; it will be better for you if you do not act thus. Do as our teacher bids us.' But there were many who had not heard, or would not believe, and things went on in the old way. But it is said that the time came when all in the farm heard the teacher's words, and not only understood them, but knew that God Himself spoke to them through the teacher; that the teacher was God; and all believed each word the teacher said to be a true and sacred word. Yet it is reported that even after this, instead of all living according to the words of the teacher, it came to pass that none turned away from violence; they all fell to struggling and fighting again. 'We are sure, now,' they said, 'that it must be so, that it cannot be otherwise.'

What could that mean? Even beasts know in what manner to eat their food without trampling it underfoot; and people who knew how to live better, who believed that God Himself had taught them how they were to live, lived worse, because, as they said, they could not live otherwise. These people must have fallen into some delusion. What could those men in the farm have imagined, to induce them to lead their former lives, despoiling each other, wasting their master's property, and ruining themselves while believing in the words of the teacher? It was this: the teacher had said to them, 'The life you lead here is a bad one, improve it and you shall be happy.' They fancied that the teacher condemned their life in the farm, and promised them another and better life, in some other place, and not in that farm. Whereupon they concluded that the farm was but an inn, and that it

was not worth while trying to live well in it; and that the only thing necessary was to endeavor not to lose the good life promised to them elsewhere. It is only thus that the strange conduct can be explained; for both those who believed that the teacher was God, and those who acknowledged him to be a clever man and his words to be just, continued to live contrary to his instructions.

If men would but keep from ruining their own lives, and keep from expecting someone from outside to come and help them – either Christ on the clouds, with the flourish of trumpets, or some historical law, or the law of the differentiation and integration of power! No one will help them, if they do not help themselves. And that is easily done. Let them expect nothing, either from heaven or earth, and simply cease from ruining their own lives.

## Chapter 8

Granting, then, that the teaching of Christ gives bliss to the world; granting that it is rational; and that man, as a rational being, has no right to renounce it; what can one man do alone, amidst a world of men who do not fulfill the law of Christ? If all would agree to practice the teaching of Christ, its fulfillment would be possible; but what can the efforts of one man avail, if the whole world is against him? How often do we hear it said, 'If, amidst a whole world of men who do not fulfill the teaching of Christ, I alone begin to follow it, by giving up what I love, by letting my cheek be struck, or even by refusing to take an oath, or to have any part in war, I shall be robbed, and, if I do not starve, I shall be either beaten to death, or imprisoned, or shot; and I shall have destroyed the happiness of my whole life, and even my life itself, in vain.'

This objection is based on the same misunderstanding on which the objection about the impracticality of following the teaching of Christ is based.

We often hear people argue thus, and I said the same myself, until I had entirely set aside the influence of Church teaching, which had prevented my taking in the full meaning of Christ's teaching about life.

Christ gives his teaching as the means of salvation from the corrupt life that those who do not follow his teaching lead, and yet I say that I should like to follow it, but cannot make up my mind to ruin my life! It would seem, then, that I do not consider my life as corrupt, but as something real and good, and something that is my own. It is this great misconception that the earthly, individual life is something real and something that actually belongs to us prevents our comprehending the teaching of Christ. Christ knows this delusion by which people consider their own individual lives as something real, and something to which they have a personal right; and he shows them, in a series of sermons and parables, that they have no claims on life, that they have, indeed, no life at all, until they attain true life by renouncing the shadow of which they call their life.

In order to understand Christ's teaching of salvation, we must, first of all, comprehend what the prophets Solomon, Buddha, and all the sages of the

world have said concerning the individual life of man. We may, as Pascal says, live on without thinking of all this, holding a screen before our eyes, which hides from us the abyss of death, toward which we are all hastening; but we need only reflect upon what the individual life of man is to be convinced that the entire life, if it is only the individual life, does not make any sense but also is an evil mockery of heart and reason of man and of everything that there is good in man. And therefore, in order to understand the teaching of Christ, we must first of all consider ourselves and repent, so that in us may be fulfilled the μετανοια, which the precursor of Christ, John the Baptist, speaks of when preaching to men who, like ourselves, had gone astray. He says first of all, 'Repent,' i.e., consider yourselves, 'otherwise you shall all perish.' He says, 'The axe is already laid to the root of the tree to hew it down. Death and destruction are close at hand. Remember this, and alter your lives.' Christ begins his preaching with the same words, 'Repent, or you shall all perish.'

Luke 13:1-5: Christ hears of the destruction of the Galileans, killed by Pilate, and he says, 'Do you suppose that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered thus? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you shall all likewise perish. Or do you think that those eighteen men, upon whom the tower of Siloam fell and killed them, were sinners above all men who lived in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you shall all likewise perish.'

If Christ lived in our days in Russia, he would have said, 'Do you suppose that those who were burnt in the circus at Berditche, or who perished on the embankment near Koukouevo<sup>1</sup>, were sinners above all others? You shall likewise perish if you do not repent, if you do not find that which is imperishable. The death of those who were crushed by the tower, who were burnt in the circus, fills you with awe, but death, awful and inevitable, awaits you too. And you endeavor in vain to forget it. If it comes upon you unawares, it will be more awful still.'

He says (Luke 12:54-57), 'When you see a cloud rise out of the west, you immediately say there is a shower coming, and so it is. And when the south wind blows, you say there will be heat, and so it is. Hypocrites, you can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it that you do not

discern this time? Why you yourselves not judge what must be?’

‘You can judge, according to various signs, what the weather will be like. How is it then, that you cannot see what awaits you yourselves? You may try to escape peril; you may take the greatest care of your life, and still, if Pilate does not kill you, the tower will crush you, and if neither Pilate nor the tower destroys you, you will die in your bed in worse tortures.’

Make a simple calculation, as worldly men do when they begin any business, as, for instance, erecting a tower, going to war, or building a factory. They work with some rational end in view.

Luke 14:28-31: ‘For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, to see whether he has sufficient resources to finish it? Lest by chance after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold begin to mock him, saying, “This man began to build and was not able to finish.” Or, what king going to make war against another king does not sit down first and consult whether he is able, with ten thousand, to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?’

‘Isn’t it senseless to work at what will never be finished, however hard you may try! Death will always come before you have built up the tower of your earthly happiness. And if you know beforehand that however you may struggle against death, it will conquer you, would it not be better, instead of struggling against it, not to put your whole soul into what shall surely perish, but to seek some work that cannot be destroyed by inevitable death?’

Luke 12:22-27: And he said to his disciples, ‘Therefore I say to you, take no thought for your life, what you shall eat; neither for the body, what you shall put on. Your life is more than meat, and your body is more than clothing. Consider the ravens; for they neither sow nor reap; they neither have storehouse nor barn, and God feeds them; how much more are you better than they? And which of you by thinking about it can add to his stature even one cubit? If you are not able to do the very thing that is least, why do you take thought for the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow; they do not toil, they do not spin; and yet I say to you that Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these.’

However much a man may care about body and food, he cannot add one

hour to his life<sup>2</sup>. Then isn't it foolish to trouble oneself about things that cannot be done?

While knowing that the end is death, you care only to assure your lives by gaining wealth. Life cannot be assured by wealth. Why will you not comprehend that you but delude yourselves with a ridiculous deception?

The purpose of life, Christ says, does not lie in what we possess, and in what we gain, what is not ourselves; it must lie in something else than that.

He says (Luke 12:16-21) that the life of man, in spite of all his riches, does not depend upon his property. 'The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully; and he thought within himself, "What shall I do? I have no room to store my fruits." And he said, "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my corn and all my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul! You have much goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry." But God said to him, "You fool, this night your soul shall be taken away of you; then whose shall those things be, which you have provided?" So it is with him who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.'

Death stands every moment over you. (Luke 12:35-40) 'Therefore, stay dressed and keep your lights shining. And you yourselves be like men who wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he comes and knocks, they may open to him immediately. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. And know this: if the owner of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore, be ready also; for the human son comes at an hour when you do not think.'

The parables of the virgins awaiting the bridegroom, of the end of the age, and of the last judgment all refer, according to the opinion of interpreters, not merely to the end of the world, but also to the peril in which every man hourly stands.

Death, death, death attends us every second. Our lives are passed in the presence of death. While working individually for your future, you well know

that the future will give you nothing but death. And death will destroy all you worked for. Thus, it is clear that life for oneself can never have any meaning. If there is a rational life, it must be some other kind of life; it must be one, the purpose of which does not consist in securing one's own future. To live rationally, we must live so that death cannot destroy our life.

Luke 10:41: 'Martha, Martha, you are careful and troubled about many things. But one thing is necessary.'

All the innumerable affairs that we transact for ourselves will be of no use to us in the future; all such things are but the illusion with which we deceive ourselves. 'But one thing is necessary.'

The state of man from the day of his birth is such that inevitable destruction awaits him, that is, a senseless life and a senseless death, if he does not find what alone is necessary for the true life. Christ reveals to men that which alone gives them the true life. He does not invent it, he does not promise to give it by his divine power; he only shows mankind that, besides the individual life, there must be another life, which is truth, and not deception.

Christ, in his parable of the vine-dresser (Matt. 21:33-42), explains the source of human error, which hides the truth from men, and which makes them consider the shadow of life, their own individual life, as the true one.

Certain people, living in their master's cultivated garden, fancied themselves the owners of that garden; and that error leads to a series of irrational and cruel actions on the part of those people, ending in their banishment, their exclusion from that life in the garden. So likewise do we fancy that the life of each of us is his own, that we have a right to it, and that we can do as we like with it, without being responsible to any one. We cannot, therefore, avoid the same series of senseless and cruel actions and misfortunes, or escape the same exclusion from the life we misuse. As the vine-dressers fancied that the more cruel they were the better they would assure their own prosperity, by killing the servants and the master's son, so do we fancy that the more cruel we are the more independent we shall become.

As it inevitably happens to the vine-dressers who, if they refuse to give the fruits of the garden, are driven out by their master, so is it with men, who fancy that life for self is the true life. Death expels them and others take

their place, not as a punishment, but merely because those people did not understand life. As the men in the garden either forgot, or would not admit, that the garden had only been entrusted to their care, that it was already cultivated and fenced around, and somebody had previously been working in it for them, and therefore expected them to work too, for the sake of others; so do men, while living for themselves, forget, or fail to recognize, all that had been done by others before their birth, and all that is done during their lifetime; and that, therefore, something is expected of them too; they choose to forget that all the blessings of life, which they enjoy, were entrusted and are entrusted to them, and must, therefore, either be transferred or returned.

This improved view of life, this μετανοια, is the cornerstone of the teaching of Christ, as he says at the end of the parable. According to Christ's teaching, the vine-dressers, who lived in the vineyard that they had not cultivated themselves, should have known and felt that they were deeply indebted to the master; and so should men likewise understand and feel that, from the day of their birth to the day of their death, they owe a heavy debt to those who lived before them, to those who still live, and to those who are to live after them, and before that which was, is, and will be the beginning of everything. They should understand that every hour of the life they continue to live that debt grows heavier; and that, therefore, the man who lives for himself, and does not acknowledge the obligation that binds him to life and to the principle of life, deprives himself of life. He should understand that by living thus he destroys his life, while desiring to save it, which Christ repeated many times.

The true life is but a continuation of past life, and promotes the good of the present life, as well as that of the future.

To be a sharer of that life, man must renounce his own will and fulfill the will of the Father of life, who gave it to the human son.

John 8:35: 'The servant who does his own will, and not that of his master, does not abide for ever in the house of his master; only the son, who fulfills the will of the father, abides forever,' Christ says, expressing the same idea in another sense.



The will of the Father of life is not the life of the individual man, but of the 'human son,' that lives in people; and therefore a man keeps his life only when he considers it as a trust given to him by the Father, in order to serve the good of all; and he really lives when he lives not for himself, but for the 'human son.'

Matt. 25:14-46: A householder gave each of his servants a share of his property and left them, without any instructions. Some of the servants, though they had not received any orders from their master concerning the way in which they were to use their share of the master's property, understood that it was not theirs, but his, and that the property was to grow; they, therefore, worked for the master. And the servants who had worked for the master became shareholders of the master's business, while those who had not worked were deprived of what had been given to them.

The life of the human son is given to all men, and they are not told why it is given to them. Some understand that life is not their own, but is a trust, and that it must serve the life of the 'human son.' Others, under the pretext that they do not understand the purpose of life, do not live up to that high aim. Those who do are united to the source of life; and those who do not, are deprived of life. And, from the verses 31 to 46, Christ tells us what is meant by serving the 'human son,' and in what the reward of that service consists. The human son, according to the words of Christ, will say (v. 34) as the king did, 'Come, you blessed of the Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you, for I was hungry, and you gave me meat; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; you clothed, visited, and comforted me; for I am the same in you, and in the least of those whom you took pity on, and to whom you have done good. You lived, not for yourselves, but for the 'human son,' and therefore shall you have eternal life.'

Christ teaches only that eternal life throughout the gospel. And strange as it may seem to say so of Christ, who himself rose from the dead, and who promised to raise all men, he never, by a single word, confirmed the belief in individual resurrection or in individual immortality beyond the grave, but he even attached to the raising up of the dead in the kingdom of the Messiah, as taught by the Pharisees, a meaning that excluded the idea of individual resurrection.

The Sadducees disputed the raising up of the dead. The Pharisees acknowledged it, as all true believers among the Jews still do.

The raising up of the dead (not the resurrection, as the word has been erroneously translated) will, according to the Jewish belief, be accomplished at the coming of the Messiah, and the establishing of the kingdom of God on earth. And Christ, on meeting with this belief in a temporary, local, and carnal resurrection, rejects it, and sets in its place his teaching of the restoration to eternal life in God.

When the Sadducees, who said there was no resurrection, and supposed that Christ agreed in opinion with the Pharisees, asked him, 'Whose wife shall she be, of the seven?' He gives a clear and definite answer to both questions.

He says (Matt. 22:29-32, Mark 12:24-27, Luke 20:34-38), 'You err, not knowing the scripture or the power of God.' And in refutation of the belief of the Pharisees, he says, 'The raising up of the dead is neither carnal nor individual. Those who are raised from the dead become the sons of God and live like angels (the powers of God) in heaven (with God), and there can be no question for them whose wife she will be, because, being one with God, they lose all individuality.' Concerning the raising up of the dead, he continues, in reply to the Sadducees, who acknowledged only an earthly life, and nothing but an earthly carnal life, 'Have you not read what God said to you? The Scripture says that God said to Moses, from the bush, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." If God said to Moses that he was the God of Jacob, then Jacob is not dead; for God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. With God all are living. And therefore, if there is a living God, the man who is one with God lives too.'

In reply to the Pharisees, Christ says that the raising from the dead cannot be carnal and individual. In reply to the Sadducees, he says that, besides an individual and temporary life, there is another life in communion with God.

Denying individual and carnal resurrection, Christ asserts that the raising from the dead lies in the transfusion of man's life into God. Christ preaches salvation from individual life, and sets that salvation in the exaltation of the human son and a life in God. Connecting his teaching with that of the Jews,

as far as concerns the coming of the Messiah, he speaks to them of the raising up of the human son from the dead, thereby meaning, not a personal carnal rising from the dead, but an awakening to life in God. Of individual carnal resurrection he never speaks. The best proof that Christ never preached the resurrection of men from the dead is found in the very two texts quoted by theologians in confirmation of his teaching of resurrection. These two texts are Matthew 25:31-46 and John 5:28-29. In the first he speaks of the coming, that is, the raising up, the exaltation, of the human son (we find the same in Matt. 10:23), and the greatness and power of the human son are likened to those of a king. In the second text, Christ speaks of the raising up of true life here on earth, as expressed in the 24th verse.

It only needs a closer consideration of the meaning of Christ's teaching of eternal life in God; it only needs to re-establish in our minds the teaching of the Jewish prophets to enable us to comprehend that if Christ had wished to preach the teaching of the resurrection of the dead, which, at that time was being embodied in the Talmud, and was a subject of dispute, he would have done so, clearly and definitely; yet, on the contrary, he not only avoided preaching that teaching, but even refuted it; nor do we find a single passage in the gospel to confirm it. The two above-mentioned texts have a very different meaning.

Strange as the assertion may seem to those who have not studied the gospel, never in a single passage does Christ speak of his own personal resurrection. If, as theologians maintain, the basis of the Christian faith is the resurrection of Christ, the least we could expect would be that Christ, knowing he would rise from the dead, and that upon his rising the chief dogma of the faith would be founded, should at least once have said so, clearly and definitely. Yet he never does; nor do we find any mention made of his resurrection throughout the whole canonical gospel. The teaching taught is the exaltation of the 'human son,' or, in other words, of the substance of life in man; and this is to acknowledge one's self to be the son of God. In himself, Christ personifies man, who acknowledges himself to be the son of God. Matt. 16:13-20: he asks the disciples what people say of him, the human son. The disciples answer that some think him to be John, miraculously raised from the dead; some think him a prophet; some Elijah, come down from heaven. 'And what do you think of me?' he asks. And

Peter, thinking of Christ as he himself did, answers, 'You are the Messiah, the son of the living God.' And Christ says, 'Flesh and blood has not revealed it to you, but our Father who is in heaven,' or, 'You have understood, not because you have believed the words of men, but because, knowing yourself to be the son of God, you have understood me.' And having explained to Peter that true faith lies in our knowing ourselves to be the sons of God, Christ says to the other disciples (v. 20) that they should, in future, tell no man that he, Jesus, is the Messiah. And then Christ says that, though he will be put to torture and death, the human son, knowing himself to be the son of God, will be raised up and will triumph over all. And yet these words are interpreted as foretelling his resurrection.

John 2:19-22, Matt. 12:40, Luke 11:20, Matt. 16:21, Matt. 16:4, Mark 8:31, Luke 9:22, Matt. 17:23, Mark 9:31, Matt. 20:19, Mark 10:34, Luke 18:33, Matt. 26:32, Mark 14:48. These fourteen texts are all supposed to prove that Christ foretold His resurrection. In three of these texts He speaks of Jonah in the belly of the whale; and in one, of the raising of the temple. In the other ten texts, Christ says that the human son cannot be destroyed; but nowhere do we find one word concerning his resurrection.

Indeed, in the original, the word 'resurrection' does not occur in any one of these texts. Give a man, unacquainted with theological interpretation, but with some knowledge of Greek, these texts to translate, and he will never render their meaning in the way our translators of the gospel have done. There are, in the original, two different words in these texts: the one is ανιστημι, the other is εγειρω. One of these words signifies 'to raise.' The other signifies 'to rouse or waken,' or it might be to awaken, to rise. But neither of them can possibly mean 'rise from the dead.' In order to be quite sure that these Greek words, and the Hebrew equivalent 'coum,' cannot signify 'to rise from the dead,' it will suffice to compare the texts in which these words are used. They occur very often, but never in the sense of 'rise from the dead.' The word 'resuscitate,' 'auferstehen,' 'réussusciter,' does not exist either in the Greek or in the Hebrew languages, any more than did the idea itself, which the word implies. In order to express the idea of resurrection in Greek or in Hebrew, a periphrasis must be made use of – either 'he rose from the dead,' or 'he awoke from the dead.' It is thus in Matt. 14:2, where we read that Herod supposed that John the Baptist had

risen from the dead; the expression is, 'woke up from the dead.' We find the same in the gospel according to St. Luke 16:31, in the parable of Lazarus. Christ says that even if a man rose from the dead they would not believe him. We again find, in this text, the words 'risen from the dead.' In the texts where the words 'to rise' or 'to wake up,' are used without the addition of the words 'from the dead,' they never did signify, and never can be supposed to signify, 'resurrection.' When Christ speaks of himself in the above-mentioned passages, which are considered as proofs that he foretold his resurrection, he never once appends the words, 'from the dead'.

Our idea of resurrection is so far from the Jews' ideas of life that we cannot even imagine Christ could have spoken to them of resurrection and of an eternal, individual life common to all people. The idea of a future individual life has not been transmitted to us, either through the teaching of the Jews or through the teaching of Christ. It made its way into the teaching of the Church from a very different source. Strange as it may sound, it must be confessed that a belief in a future individual life is the lowest and grossest conception, based only on a confusion of sleep with death, which is common to all barbarous nations. The teaching of the Jews, however, stood immeasurably higher than that conception. We feel so convinced that this superstition is a very exalted one that we very seriously allege, as a proof of the superiority of our teaching over all others, the fact that we uphold that superstition, while others, as for instance, the Chinese and the Hindus, do not. This is maintained, not only by theologians, but also by free-thinking learned historians of religion such as Tille, Max Müller, and others. Classifying the various religions, they assert that the religions that keep to that superstition are superior to those that do not. The free-thinker, Schopenhauer, calls the Jewish religion the most contemptible (niederträchtigste) of all, because it contains no idea (keine idee) of the immortality of the soul. And, indeed, in the Jewish religion, neither the meaning nor the word expressive of it exists. Eternal life in the Hebrew language is 'haieoïlom.' The word 'oïlom' signifies, 'endless, immutable.' 'Oïlom' likewise signifies 'world' – cosmos. Life in general, and especially eternal life, haieoïlom is, according to the Jews, proper to God alone. God is the God of life – the living God. Man, according to the Jewish belief, is always mortal. God alone lives forever. In the five books of Moses we find

the words 'eternal life' used twice. Once in Deuteronomy 32:39-40, God says, 'See now that I am I, and there is no other God but Me. I kill and I make alive, I wound and I heal, neither is there any who can be delivered from Me. I lift up my hand to heaven and say, I live for ever.' In the book of Genesis 3:22, God says, 'Behold, the man has eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and has become like one of us; and now, he might put forth his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever.' These are the only two cases in which the words 'eternal life' are used in the Old Testament – excepting one chapter of the apocryphal book of Daniel – and they clearly define the idea the Jews had both of life in general and of eternal life. Life itself, according to Jewish belief, is eternal, and it is such in God; man is always mortal – such is his nature.

The Old Testament does not tell us, as our Bible histories do, that God breathed an immortal soul into man, nor that the first man was immortal until he sinned. According to the Book of Genesis (1:26), God created man, as he did all other living creatures, male and female, and commanded them to increase and multiply. God spoke of man just as he spoke of beast. In the second chapter it is said that man learned to 'know good and evil.' But we are told too, that God 'drove man out of Eden, and barred his way to the tree of life.' Thus man has not yet eaten of the fruit of the tree of life, and thus he did not attain the haieoïlom, i.e., eternal life, but remained mortal.

According to Jewish teaching, man is mortal. Life for him is but a life that continues in the people, from generation to generation. Only the nation, according to Jewish teaching, can live. When God says you shall live and not die, he speaks to the people. The life breathed by God into man is but a mortal life for each individually, but it continues from generation to generation if men fulfill their covenant with God, if they keep the conditions laid down by God.

After expounding the laws, and declaring that these laws were not in heaven, but in their own hearts, Moses says (Deut. 30:15), 'See, I now set before you life and good, death and evil, exhorting you to love God and walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, that you may live.' And verse 19: 'I call heaven and earth to record against you that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; choose life, that you and your

descendants may live, loving God, obeying Him and cleaving to Him; for He is your life and the length of your days.'

The principal difference between our idea of human life and that of the Jews is that, according to us, our mortal life – which passes on from generation to generation – is not the true life, but a fallen one, a temporary corrupt life; while, according to the Jews this life is the true one, it is the highest blessing given to man, and given to him on the condition that he fulfills the will of God. From our point of view, the transition of that fallen life from generation to generation is the continuation of the curse. From the Jewish point of view it is the highest blessing man can attain, and he attains it by fulfilling the will of God.

It is on this idea of life that Christ bases his teaching concerning the true or eternal life, which he opposes to mortal, individual life. 'Search the Scriptures,' Christ says to the Jews (John 5:39), 'for in them you think you have eternal life.'

A young man asks Christ (Matt. 19) what he should do to have eternal life. In answer to his question Christ says, 'If you will enter into life' (He does not say life eternal, but 'life'), 'keep the commandments.' He says the same to the lawyers, 'Do this, and you shall live' (Luke 10:28); and again he says 'live' without adding 'eternally.' In both these cases Christ defines what each man should understand by the words 'eternal life.' In using these words he says to the Jews what is more than once said in their law, that fulfilling the will of God is eternal life.

Christ contrasts a temporary, personal, individual life with the eternal life, which, according to Deuteronomy, God promised to Israel, with the only difference that, according to the Jews, eternal life was to continue only among the chosen people of Israel, and that it was necessary, in order to attain that life, to keep the laws given by God exclusively to Israel; but, according to the teaching of Christ, eternal life continues in the human son, and, in order to keep it, it is necessary to fulfill the laws of Christ, which teach what the will of God is for all mankind.

It is not a life beyond the grave that Christ contrasts with individual life, but a life bound up with the present, past, and future of all mankind – the life of

the 'human son.'

Individual life was redeemed from perdition, according to the Jews, only by fulfilling the will of God, expressed in the commandments given by God to Moses. It was only thus that life was not destroyed, but was to pass from generation to generation, among the chosen people of God. Individual life is saved from perdition, according to the teaching of Christ, likewise by fulfilling the will of God, expressed in the commandments of Christ. It is only thus that individual life does not perish, but becomes eternal in the human son. The only difference between the two teachings is that, according to Moses, serving God meant the serving Him of but one people, whereas, according to Christ, the serving of God the Father means the serving of God by all mankind. Life could hardly continue through long generations among one people; for the nation itself might disappear off the face of the earth, and its continuation would depend upon the increase or diminution of posterity. But endless life, according to the teaching of Christ, is certain, for it is transferred into the human son living up to the will of the Father.

Let us suppose that Christ's words concerning the day of judgment and the end of the world, as well as the words we read in the gospel of St. John, do promise a life beyond the grave for the souls of the dead, yet there can be no doubt that his teaching of the light of life, of the kingdom of God, has a meaning as intelligible to us as it was to his hearers; i.e., that true life is but the life of the human son, according to the will of the Father. This can be more easily admitted, as the teaching concerning true life, according to the will of the Father of Life, includes the idea of immortality and life beyond the grave.

It would perhaps be more just to infer that man, after a life passed in following his own will in this world, will not enjoy an eternal individual life of bliss in paradise. That would perhaps be more just, but to think thus, to believe in eternal bliss awaiting me as a reward for the good I have done, and eternal torment as the punishment of my evil deeds, does not lead to a clear comprehension of Christ's teaching. To think thus is, on the contrary, to do away with the groundwork of Christ's teaching.

The whole purpose of Christ's teaching is to teach his disciples that, individual life being but a delusion, they should renounce it and transfer



their individual lives into the life of all humanity, into the life of the human son. The teaching of the immortality of each soul does not require of us to renounce our lives, but, on the contrary, confirms their individuality forever.

According to the ideas of the Jews, the Chinese, and the Hindus, and of all those who do not believe in the dogmas of the fall of man and the redemption, the life we have is life. Man lives, has children, educates them, grows old, and dies. His children grow up and continue his life, which goes on without intermission from generation to generation, existing just as all else in the world exists – stones, metals, plants, beasts, and all else. Life is life, and we must make the most of it. To live for self alone is irrational. And, therefore, since man has first existed on the earth, each one seeks some aim in life beyond his own individual life. He lives for his children, his family, his nation, for humanity, for all that does not die with his individual life.

Now, according to the teaching of our Church, life, the greatest blessing known to us, is only a part of life, the rest of which is kept from us for a time. According to the Church, our life is not the life God wished to give us, not the life God ought to have given to us; but a corrupt, bad, fallen life, only an imperfect specimen of what life should be. The chief problem of life, according to this thesis, does not consist in leading the mortal life that is given to us as the giver of it wishes us to do; not in our considering it eternal from generation to generation, as the Jews do; nor in uniting it to the will of the Father, as Christ taught us to do, but in persuading ourselves that after this life the true life will begin.

Christ says nothing of that imaginary life. The theories of the fall of Adam, of eternal life in paradise, and of the immortal soul breathed by God into Adam, were unknown to Christ, and therefore He does not mention them, nor even allude to them.

Christ speaks of the life that is, and that always will be. We speak of an imaginary life, which never did exist. Then how are we to understand the teaching of Christ?

Christ could never have supposed so strange an idea among his followers. He supposes all men to understand that individual life must inevitably perish; and he reveals a life that cannot perish. Christ comforts those who

are in trouble; but his teaching can give nothing to those who are convinced that they have more than Christ can give. Suppose I were to exhort a man to work, assuring him that he would thereby earn food and clothing, and that man were suddenly to discover he was already a millionaire, isn't it obvious that he would not heed my words? It is thus with the teaching of Christ. Why should I work, when I can be rich without doing so? What profit shall I have of living up to the commandments of God, when I am convinced that, whether I do or not, I shall live forever, individually?

We are taught that Christ-God, the second person of the Trinity, saved mankind by being incarnate and by taking upon himself the sin of Adam and of all mankind; that he redeemed man from sin and the wrath of the first person of the Trinity, and that he instituted the Church and the sacraments for our salvation; that we have but to believe this to be saved, and to attain an eternal, individual life beyond the grave. But we cannot deny that Christ likewise saved men by warning them of their inevitable destruction, and still saves them by the same; and that his words – 'I am the way, the life, and the truth' – point out to us the true path of life, instead of the wrong path of individual life that we trod before.

There may be people who doubt the existence of life beyond the grave, and of salvation being based on redemption, but no one can doubt the salvation of all people in general, and of each individually, through their being warned of the inevitable destruction brought on by individual life, and through being shown that the true way to salvation lies in the fusion of their will with the will of the Father. Let any rational being ask himself what are life and death as applied to himself personally. Let him try to attach any other meaning to life and death than that which Christ pointed out.

Every idea of individual life, if it is not based on the renouncing of self for the service of people, of mankind, of the human son, is an illusion that vanishes at the first touch of reason. I cannot doubt that, though my individual life is perishable, the life of the world according to the will of the Father can never be destroyed; and that a fusion with it alone makes salvation possible for me. But that is so little, compared to the elevated religious faith in a future life! Little, I grant, but it is sure.

I lose my way in a snowdrift. A man assures me that he sees lights in the

distance; that there is a village nearby. He thinks he sees the lights, and so do I; but it only seems to us that we see them because we desire to see them, for we tried to reach these same lights before, and could not find them. One of us walks on through the snow, and in a short time comes out onto the road and cries, 'Do not go on, the lights you see are only in your imagination; you will lose your way and perish! I stand on firm ground, follow me, this road will lead us out!' That is but little. While believing in the lights, which glimmered before our dazzled eyes, we saw ourselves in our imaginations already in the village, in a warm hut, in safety and at rest, while here there was only firm ground. Yes; but if we follow the man who spoke first we shall inevitably freeze to death; if we mind the second, we shall reach the good road.

And what shall I do, if I alone have understood the teaching of Christ and believe in it, among all those who do not understand and will not fulfill it?

What shall I do? Shall I live as all do, or live according to Christ's teaching? I understand his commandments, and I see that the fulfilling of them will lead me, and all men, to perfect happiness. I understand that it is the will of the Author of all things, the will of him from whom I have life, that these commandments should be fulfilled.

I understand that, whatever I may do, I shall inevitably perish, as will all those around me, after a senseless life and death, if I do not fulfill the will of the Father; and that the only possibility of salvation lies in fulfilling it.

By acting as others do, I act against the good of all men, I act contrary to the will of the Father of life, and I deprive myself of the only possibility of bettering my hopeless state. By doing what Christ teaches me I shall ensure the good of all men – of those who live at present, and of those who are to live after me. I do what he who gave me life desires me to do. I do what can alone save me.

The circus in Berditch is on fire. All crowd toward the door, crushing each other in their efforts to open the door, which opens inward. A savior comes and says to them, 'Move further from the door, turn back; the closer you all stand to the door, the less hope of safety there is for you. If you turn back you will find an exit, and you will be saved!' Whether I alone hear the words

and believe matters but little; but having heard and believed, can I do otherwise than turn back and call upon the others to follow the voice of him who comes to save them? I shall, perhaps, be smothered, crushed, or killed; but the sole hope of safety is in my going toward the only exit. A savior must be a savior indeed, i.e., he must save. And the salvation of Christ is salvation indeed. He appeared, he spoke, and mankind is now saved.

The circus burned for a whole hour; and it was necessary to make haste, or else all could not have been saved. But the world has been burning for eighteen hundred years; burning from the time Christ said, 'I come to send fire on the earth; and how I languish until it is kindled.' And it will burn until men are saved. Wasn't man created, and doesn't the fire burn, only that the happiness of man might be saved from it?

I know there is no other door, either for myself or for those who suffer with me in this life. I know that neither those around me nor I can be saved, except by fulfilling the commandments of Christ, which give the highest bliss to all mankind.

I may have more to suffer. I may die earlier, through fulfilling Christ's teaching. I fear neither suffering nor death. He who does not see how senseless and perishable his individual life is, he who thinks that he will not die, may fear. But, knowing that life for individual happiness alone is foolish to the highest degree, and that the end of that foolish life will be but a foolish death, I cannot fear it. I shall die, as all do, as those who do not fulfill Christ's teaching do – yet my life and death will have some meaning for myself and for all. My life and death will minister to the salvation and lives of all men; and that is what Christ taught us.

## Chapter 9

If all people would be fulfilling Christ's teaching, the kingdom of God would be on earth. If I alone fulfill it, I will do what is best for all mankind and myself. There is no salvation without fulfilling the teaching of Christ.

But where shall I find the faith that will enable me to obey Christ's teaching, to practice it, and never to swerve from it? 'I believe, Lord; help my unbelief.'

The apostles begged Christ to confirm their faith. 'I desire to do good, yet I do evil,' says Paul the apostle.

'It is hard to be saved.' This is what each says and thinks.

A drowning man calls for help. A rope is thrown him. It could save him; but the drowning man cries, 'Confirm my belief that this rope can save me.' 'I believe,' says the man, 'that it can save me; but help my unbelief.'

What does that mean? If a man does not take hold of what alone can save him, doesn't it prove that he is unaware of the danger he is in?

How can a Christian who professes to believe in the divinity of Christ and of his teaching say that he would believe if he could? God himself, when on earth, said, 'You are on the eve of eternal torment and fire, of complete, eternal darkness. I bring you salvation; do as I tell you, and you shall be saved.' Can a Christian reject the salvation offered him – remain unmindful of his savior's words, and say, 'Help my unbelief?'

If a man spoke thus, would it not seem as if he not only refused to believe that destruction awaited him, but was convinced he should not perish?

Some children have leaped overboard into the water. The current, for a time, upholds them before their clothes are entirely soaked through. They swim about, unconscious of danger. A rope is thrown to them from the ship. They are entreated by those on board to take hold of the rope. (We find the same meaning in the parables of the woman who had found a farthing, of the shepherd who found the sheep that was lost, and in the parables of the supper and of the prodigal son.) But the children will not believe; not because they think the rope is an unsafe one, but because they do not believe that they are about to perish. Thoughtless children, like themselves,

have told them that they will go on bathing merrily, even when the ship sails away. The children do not believe that the time is near when their clothes will be wet through, their little arms tired out; when they will begin to lose breath, and that then they will choke and drown. They do not believe that, and therefore they do not believe in the rope of salvation.

Men are like the children who have jumped overboard, and are sure they will not perish. Therefore they do not take hold of the rope. They believe in the immortality of the soul and are convinced that they will not perish, and therefore they do not fulfill the teaching of Christ-God. They do not believe in what is indubitable, only because they believe in what is beyond all possibility of belief. And they cry, "confirm our belief that we are not perishing.'

But that is impossible. For them to believe they will be saved they must cease to do what brings destruction, and begin to do what will save them; they must take hold of the rope of salvation. But they do not choose to do this; they wish to be assured that they are not perishing, though their companions perish, one after another, before their eyes. And that desire to grow sure of what is not, they call 'faith.' No wonder, then, that they have little faith and that they long for more.

It was only when I understood Christ's teaching that I saw that what such men call 'faith' is not faith. It is only the false faith that the apostle James opposes in his epistle. The Church did not accept that epistle for a long time; and when it was accepted it underwent several changes. Some words were removed, and others transposed or incorrectly translated. I here give the accepted translation, only correcting what is inexact, according to Tischendorf's text.

James 2:14-26: 'What does it profit, my brethren, if a man supposes that he has faith, and does not have works? Faith cannot save him. If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them those things that they need; what good is that? Even so faith, if it does not have works, is dead, being alone. Yes, a man may say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God; you do well. The devils

also believe, and tremble. But will you know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Wasn't Abraham our father justified by works when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? See how faith worked with his deeds, and by his deeds his faith was made perfect? ... You see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith alone. ... For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.'

Apostle James says that the only proof of faith is in the works that proceed from it; and that faith from which no works proceed is but a word, with which we can neither feed any, nor justify ourselves and be saved. And therefore the faith that is not accompanied by works is not faith. It is only a wish to believe; it is only a mistaken assertion that I believe when I do not really believe.

According to this definition, faith must be allied to works, and works make faith perfect, i.e., true.

The Jews said to Christ (Mark 15:32. Matt. 27:42, John 6:30), 'What sign will you give us, that we may see and believe you? What will you do?' The same men said to him when he was on the cross, 'Let him descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe.' (Mark 15:32) Matt. 27:42: 'He saved others, but himself he cannot save! If he is the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.'

In answer to their prayer that he may 'increase their faith,' Christ says that the wish is vain; that they cannot be forced to believe (Luke 22:67). He says, 'If I tell you, you will not believe' (John 10:25-26). 'I told you, and you have not believed. You do not believe because you are not of my sheep, as I said to you.'

The Jews required some outward token to enforce their belief in the teaching of Christ, just as the Christian followers of the Church do now. And he answers that it cannot be given to them, and explains why it is impossible to do so. He says that they cannot believe because they are not of his sheep, or, they do not follow the path of life that he points out to his flock. He explains (John 5:44) wherein lies the difference between his sheep and those who are not of his flock. He explains the reason why some believe and others do not, and tells them what the basis of faith is. 'How can you

believe,' he says, 'when you accept each other's <sup>3</sup>δοξα, teaching, and do not seek the teaching that comes from God alone?'

In order to believe, Christ says we must seek the teaching that comes from God. 'He who speaks from himself, seeks his own teaching (δοξαν την ιδιαν); but he who seeks the teaching of Him who sent Him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him' (John 7:18).

The teaching of life, δοξα, is the basis of faith.

All our actions proceed from faith. Faith proceeds from the δοξα of the light in which we consider life. There may be innumerable deeds and numerous beliefs, but there are only two teachings of life (δοξα). Christ rejects one of them, and acknowledges the other. The one that Christ rejects is that of the existence of individual life, as belonging to man. It is the teaching that was then, and is still, maintained by the majority of men, and from which proceeds all the various beliefs of men, and all their deeds. The other teaching is the one taught by Christ and the prophets: that our individual life has a meaning only when we fulfill the will of God.

If a man has the δοξα that his individuality is of more importance than all else, he will consider his individual happiness as the chief and most desirable object in life; and according as he finds that happiness in the purchase of landed property, in fame, in glory, or in the satisfaction of his lusts, his faith will coincide with his views of life, and all his actions will be guided by it.

If the δοξα of a man is not such, if he understands the true purpose of life to lie in fulfilling the will of God, as Abraham understood it, and as Christ taught it, his actions will coincide with his faith in what he knows to be the will of God.

This is the reason why those who believe in the happiness of an individual life cannot believe in the teaching of Christ. All their endeavors to do so will be in vain. In order to believe, they must change their views of life. Until they have done so, their actions will coincide with their creed, and not with their desires or their words.

The desire to believe in the teaching of Christ, both of those who asked him for some token, and of the believers of the present time, does not coincide



with their lives, nor can it ever do so, however hard they may try to fit them together. They may pray to Christ-God, attend the Holy Communion, do good to mankind, build churches, convert others, and yet, with all this, they cannot really work of Christ; because that can proceed only from faith, which is based on a very different teaching (δοξα) to the one that they profess. They cannot sacrifice the life of their only son, as Abraham did, who did not doubt for a moment that it was his duty to offer up his son as a sacrifice to God, to the God who alone gave importance to his life. And in the same way, Christ and his disciples could not help giving up their lives to others, because in that alone lay the object and blessing of their lives. It is from men's thus misunderstanding the substance of faith that their strange longing arises. They make themselves believe that it would be better to live up to the teaching of Christ; and all the while they firmly believe in the individual life, and therefore choose to live contrary to Christ's teaching.

The foundation of faith is a true comprehension of life, which enables man to distinguish what is important and good in life from what is unimportant and bad. Faith is a correct appreciation of all the manifestations of life. At the present time men, whose faith is grounded on a teaching of their own, cannot make it agree with the faith that flows out of the teaching of Christ any more than the disciples could. And we find this misunderstanding more than once clearly and definitely spoken of in the gospel. In the gospel according to St. Matthew 20:20-28, and in that according to Mark 10:35-45, after saying, that the 'rich man cannot enter the kingdom of God,' and after the still more awful saying that 'he who does not leave all, who does not give up his life for Christ's sake, shall not be saved,' Peter asks, 'What, then, shall we have, who have left all and followed You?' In the gospel according to Mark we read that James and John (or, according to Matthew, their mother) ask that 'they should sit, one on his right hand, the other on his left, in his glory.' They beg him to confirm their faith by the promise of a reward. Christ answers Peter's question by a parable (Matt. 20:1-16); and in answer to James he says, 'You do not know what you ask,' i.e., 'you ask for what cannot be. You do not understand my teaching. My teaching is the renunciation of individual life, and you ask for individual honor, and individual reward. You may 'drink of my cup' (or live the life like I did); but to sit on my right hand, or my left, or to be equal to me, cannot be given to

you.’ And then Christ says that it is only in this world that the powerful of the world think much of the glory and power of individual life, and rejoice in it; but you, who are my disciples, ought to know that the true life does not lie in individual happiness, but in ministering to all, in humbling ourselves before all. Man does not live to be ministered to, but to minister to all, and to give up his individual life as a ransom for all. In answer to his disciples’ request, which showed Him how little they understood His teaching, Christ does not command them to believe, i.e., to change their appreciation of good and evil, which arose from the teaching they had imbibed before him (he knows that it is impossible); but he explains what the true life is, on which faith is based, and shows that it is a true estimation of good and bad, important and unimportant.

Christ answers Peter’s question, ‘What reward shall we have for having left all, and following you?’ with the parable of the laborers who were hired at different times, and who received the same pay (Matt. 20:1-16). He explains to Peter the error he is in with respect to his teaching, and that his lack of faith proceeds from his error. Christ says it is only in individual life that reward is important in proportion to the work done. A belief in the necessity of reward being proportionate to the work itself proceeds from the teaching of individual life. This belief is based on a hypothesis and on rights, which we imagine that we have; but man has no rights and can never have any rights; he is only a debtor for the happiness given to him, and therefore he has no right to expect anything. Even if he gives up his whole life, he cannot give back what he has received, and therefore the master cannot be unjust. If a man declares that he has a right to his own life, and requires compensation from the Author of all – from Him who entrusted him with life – he only shows that he does not understand the true purpose for which life was given to him.

Men, having obtained happiness, require more. These men stood unoccupied and miserable in the market place, and did not live. The master hired them and gave them the greatest good in life: labor. They accepted the master’s gracious gift, and then grew dissatisfied. They were dissatisfied because they had no clear consciousness of their state. They came to their work with the false idea that they had a right to their own lives and to their own work, and that, therefore, their work was to be rewarded. They did not

understand that work itself was the greatest good given to them, in return for which they were to return the same good, but that they could claim no reward. And men cannot have a just and true faith as long as they possess the same erroneous idea of life as these laborers had.

Christ answers the direct demand of his disciples to confirm, to increase, their faith by the parable of the master and the laborers, and explains still more clearly the groundwork of the faith he taught them. Luke 17:3-10: The precept given by Christ to forgive our brother not only once, but seventy times seven, fills the disciples with awe at the difficulty that they would experience in putting such a precept into practice, and they say, 'Yes but... to fulfill it we must believe. Increase, and confirm our faith.' As they had asked before, 'What shall we have for it?' so do they again say, just as all who call themselves Christians say, 'I would believe, but I cannot. Strengthen my faith.' They say, 'Make us believe,' just as the disciples did when they asked for a miracle. 'Make us believe in our salvation by miracles and promises of reward.'

The disciples spoke just as we do. It would be well if, while continuing to lead our individual, willful lives, we could be made to believe that by fulfilling God's commandments we should be all the happier. We all ask for what is contrary to the whole spirit of Christ's teaching, and we are surprised that we can by no means believe. And Christ answers the misunderstanding, which existed then, and still exists, by a parable in which he shows what true faith is. Faith cannot proceed from trust in what he says<sup>4</sup>; faith comes only from the understanding of our situation. Faith is based only on the rational consciousness of what is best for us. He shows that it is impossible to rouse faith in men by promises of rewards and by threats of punishments; that it will be but a very weak trust that will be destroyed at the first temptation; that the faith that moves mountains, the faith that nothing can shake, is based on the consciousness of our inevitable peril, and of the sole salvation possible for us.

Faith needs no promises of reward. It is only necessary to understand that salvation from inevitable destruction lies in a life in unity with all humanity according to the will of the Master. He who has once understood this will seek no confirmation of his faith, but will be saving himself without his

requiring any exhortation.

When the disciples beg him to confirm their faith, Christ says, 'When the master comes home with his laborer from the field, he does not tell him to sit down and eat immediately, but first orders him to pen the cattle and to serve him; and, this done, the laborer sits down to his food and eats. The laborer obeys, and does not think himself ill used, neither does he pride himself on his work, nor require thanks or a reward for it. He knows that it must be so, and that he has only done his duty; that is all that is required of him by his service, but just this is, at the same time, for his own good. In like manner, when you have done all you are bound to do, think that you have only done what was given to you to do.' He who understands his duty toward his Master will see that it is only by submitting to his Master's will that he can have life, and can know wherein lies the blessing of his life. And he will have faith – the faith that Christ teaches us. Faith, according to the teaching of Christ, is based on a rational consciousness of the purpose of life.

The foundation of faith, according to the teaching of Christ, is light.

John 1:9-12: 'That was the true light, which lights every man who comes into the world. It was in the world, and the world originated through it, and the world did not know it. It came to its own, and its own did not receive it. And as many as received it and believed in its name, to them it gave power to become the sons of God.' John 3:19-21: 'And this is the judgment<sup>5</sup>, that light has come into the world; and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, neither does he come to the light, lest his deeds should be seen and disapproved, because they are evil. But he who does truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, because they are done through God.'

He who has understood the teaching of Christ can require no strengthening of his faith. Faith, according to Christ, is based on the light, on the truth. Not once does Christ call upon men to have faith in Him; He calls upon them to have faith in the truth.

John 8:40, 46: He says to the Jews, 'You seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth, which I have heard from God. Which of you convicts me of

untruth? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?’

John 18:37: Christ says, ‘To this end I was born, and for this cause I came into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice.’ John 14:6: He says, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life.’

Further on, in the same chapter, Christ says to his disciples, ‘The Father shall give you another comforter, and he may abide with you forever. He is the spirit of truth, who the world does not see and does not know; but you know him, for he dwells in you and shall be in you.’

He says that his whole teaching is truth, that he himself is truth.

The teaching of Christ is the teaching of truth, and, therefore, faith in Christ is not a trust in anything that refers to Jesus, but a knowledge of the truth. It is impossible to persuade or bribe a man to fulfill the teaching of Christ. He who understands the teaching of Christ will have faith in it, because this teaching is truth. He who knows the truth cannot refuse to believe in it. Therefore, if a man feels himself to be sinking, he cannot refuse to take hold of the rope of salvation. And the question, ‘What shall we do to believe?’ is one that shows a total misunderstanding of Christ’s teaching.

## Chapter 10

We say that it is hard to live in accordance with Christ's precepts! How can it be otherwise than hard while we conceal our situation from ourselves and earnestly try to maintain the trust that our situation is not what it really is? Calling that trust 'faith' we exalt it into something sacred, and either by violence, by working upon the feelings, by threats, by flattery, or by deceit we seek to allure others to that false trust. A Christian once said, 'Credo quia absurdum,' and other Christians now enthusiastically repeat the words, thinking a belief in absurdities is the best way to the truth. A clever and learned man observed to me, a short time ago, in the course of conversation, that the Christian teaching was of no importance as a teaching or morality. 'We find the same,' he said, 'in the teachings of the Stoics, the Brahmins, and in the Talmud. The substance of the Christian teaching is in the theosophical teaching contained in the dogmas.' That means that what is eternal and general to all humanity, what is necessary for life, and what is rational, is not of most value. But what is quite incomprehensible, and therefore unnecessary, but in the name of which millions have been put to death, is the most important point of Christianity!

We have formed an erroneous idea of life, both as concerns ourselves personally and the world in general. We have based it on our own wickedness and on our personal lusts; and we look upon that erroneous idea – united only by outward observances to the teaching of Christ – as most important and necessary to life. Were it not for that trust in what is but falsehood, which has been upheld by men for ages, the falsity of our view of life, as well as the truth of Christ's teaching, would have become manifest long ago.

Awful as it may seem to say so, I sometimes think that if the teaching of Christ, with the Church teaching that has become a part of it, had never existed, those who now call themselves Christians would be nearer than they are now to the teaching of Christ; i.e., to a rational idea of the true happiness of life. The morality taught by all the prophets would not then have been a closed book for them. They would have had their petty preachers of the truth, and they would have believed them. But now that the whole truth has been revealed, it seems so awful to those whose deeds

are evil that they have interpreted it falsely, and men have lost their trust in the truth. In our European world the saying of Christ, that 'He came into the world in order to bear witness of the truth, and that he who is of the truth hears him,' has long since been answered in the words of Pilate, 'What is the truth?' We have taken in earnest these words of Pilate's, expressive of such sad and deep irony, and we have made them our faith. In our world not only do all live without knowing the truth, and without a desire to know it, but also with the firm conviction that of all idle occupations the idlest is the search after truth.

The teaching of life that all nations, long before the existence of European society, considered as most important, that teaching which, as Christ told us, is the only thing necessary, is alone excluded from our lives. This is done by the institution called the Church; and yet even those who themselves belong to that institution have long ceased to believe in it.

The only aperture that lets in the light, toward which the eyes of all who reflect and suffer turn, is concealed. There is but one answer to the questions, 'What am I? What shall I do? Can I not render my life easier by following the commandments of the God who, according to your words, came to save us?' And that answer is, "Honor and obey the authorities, and believe in the Church." 'But why do we live in such awful way?' cries a despairing voice; 'Why is there so much evil? Can I not change my life to avoid taking part in it? Can evil not be mitigated?' The answer is, 'It is impossible. Your wish to lead a good life, and to help others to do so, is but pride and vainglory. The only thing you can do is to save yourself, your soul, for a future life. If you wish to flee from the evils of the world, leave the world.' 'There is a way open to each,' says the teaching of the Church, 'but know that, having chosen it, you have lost all right to return to the world, that you must cease to live, and must voluntarily die a lingering death.' There are only two ways open to us; our teachers tell us that 'we must either believe our spiritual pastors and obey them and those who are in authority over us, and take an active part in the evil they organize, or else leave the world and enter a monastery, deprive ourselves of food and sleep, let our bodies rot on a iron pillar, bend and unbend our bodies in endless genuflections, and do nothing for our fellow-creatures.' Thus, a man must either confess the teaching of Christ to be impracticable, and live contrary to

it, or renounce the life of this world, which is but a type of slow suicide.

Surprising as the erroneous assumption that the teaching of Christ is sublime but impracticable may seem to him who understands it, the error by which it is maintained, that he who wishes to keep the commandments of Christ, not only in word but in deed, must leave the world, is still more surprising.

The erroneous idea that it is better for a man to leave the world than to submit to its temptations is an old error, known to the ancient Hebrews, but entirely foreign not only to the spirit of Christianity, but even to that of Judaism. It was against that very error that the story Christ loved and so often quoted, of the prophet Jonah, was written. The story contains one idea from beginning to end. The prophet Jonah wishes to be the only just man, and flies from association with the depraved inhabitants of Nineveh. But God shows him that he is a prophet – one whose duty it is to make the truth known to those who have gone astray – and that he must not flee from them, but live among them. Jonah has an aversion to the depraved Ninevites, and once more tries to escape by flight. But God brings him back in the body of a whale, and the will of the Almighty is accomplished; the Ninevites receive the teaching of God, through Jonah, and amend their lives. But Jonah does not rejoice at having been instrumental in accomplishing the will of God; he is angry, jealous of the Ninevites; he wishes to be the only wise and good man. He goes away into the wilderness, bemoans his fate, and reproaches God. And then a gourd grows over Jonah in one night and protects him from the rays of the sun; but on the next night worms eat the gourd. Jonah, in his despair, reproaches God for letting the gourd, so precious to him, wither. Then God says to him, ‘You regret the gourd, which you called yours; it grew and perished in one night; and do you think I had no pity for so numerous a people, who were perishing, living like the beasts, unable to distinguish their right hands from their left? Your knowledge of the truth was needed that you might have given to those who did not have it.’

Christ knew this story and often quoted it; we are likewise told in the gospel that Christ himself, after visiting John the Baptist, who had retired to the wilderness before he began his preaching, was subjected to the same temptation, and was conducted into the wilderness to be tempted by the



devil (by delusion). He overcame that delusion and, in the strength of the spirit, came back into Galilee and, from that time, without abhorring those who were depraved, he passed his life among publicans, Pharisees, and sinners, teaching them the truth.<sup>6</sup>

According to the teaching of the Church, Christ, who was God and man, gave us an example of how we were to live. Christ passed His whole life, as we know, in the turmoil of life, with publicans, adulteresses, and the Pharisees in Jerusalem. His two great commandments are love to our fellow-creatures and the preaching of His teaching to all men. Both commandments require constant communication with the world. Yet the conclusion drawn from Christ's teaching is that, in order to be saved, we must leave all, cease all communication with our fellow-creatures, and stand on a pillar. Thus it would seem that, in order to follow the example of Christ, we must do just the contrary of what he taught and of what he did himself.

According to the interpretation given by the Church, Christ's teaching does not teach either secular men or monks how they are to live in order to make their own lives and the lives of their fellow-creatures better, but teaches the former what they must believe in order to be saved in the next world, in spite of their evil lives, and enjoins the latter to make their lives on earth still harder. But this is not what Christ teaches us.

Christ preaches truth, and if abstract truth is truth, it will be truth in reality. If life in God is the only true life, blissful in itself, it will be true and blissful here on earth, in all the various circumstances of life. If life here did not confirm the teaching of Christ, that teaching would not be true.

Christ does not call men from better to worse, but on the contrary, from worse to better. He pities men, whom he considers as lost sheep perishing without their shepherd, and promises them a shepherd and good pasture. He says that his disciples will be persecuted for his teaching, that they must suffer, and bear the persecution of the world. But he does not say that if they follow his teaching they will suffer more severely than if they follow the teaching of the world; on the contrary, he says that those who follow the teaching of the world will be miserable, and those who follow his teaching will be blessed.

Christ does not teach us that we shall be saved either through faith, or through asceticism, i.e., self-deception, or voluntary torments in this life; but he teaches us a life in which, besides salvation from the ruin of individual life, there will be less suffering and more joy than in individual life, even here on earth.

Revealing his teaching to people, Christ says that by following his teaching, even in the midst of those who do not do so, they will be happier than those who do not fulfill his teaching. Christ says that, even from a worldly point of view, it is a successful plan not to care about the life of this world.

Mark 10:28-31: Then Peter began to say to him, 'Lo, we have left all, and have followed you.' Matt.19:27, 29-30: 'What shall we have therefore?' And Jesus answered and said, 'Truly I say to you, there is no man who has left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for my sake and the gospel's, but he shall receive, beside the persecutions, a hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children and lands; and in the world to come eternal life.' (Matt. 19:27; Luke 5:11; 18:28)

Christ mentions, it is true, that those who follow him shall be persecuted by those who do not; but he does not say that the disciples shall lose anything by doing so. On the contrary, he says that his followers shall have more joy in this world than those who are not his.

We cannot doubt that Christ spoke and thought thus. He says it clearly; the spirit of his teaching proves it, as well as the way in which he himself and his disciples lived. But is it true?

On an abstract examination of the question, whether the state of the followers of Christ or that of those who live for the world will be best, we cannot help seeing that the state of the followers of Christ must be better, because, by doing good to all, they avoid exciting the hatred of men. The follower of Christ will do no harm to any and might be persecuted by the wicked; but the followers of the world will be persecuted by all, because the law of life, of those who live for the world, is a law of strife, or the persecution of each other. The chances of suffering may be the same for both, with the difference that the followers of Christ will be ready to bear

them, while the followers of the world will use all their endeavors to avoid them; the followers of Christ will suffer, but will know that their suffering is necessary for the good of humanity, while the followers of the world will suffer without knowing the reason why they suffer. Reasoning abstractly, the state of the followers of Christ should be more profitable than that of the followers of the world. But is it so?

Let each verify this by calling to mind all the trying moments of his life, all the suffering, both moral and physical, which he has gone through, and still goes through, and let him ask himself in whose name he bore, and still bears, all that misery. Was it for the sake of the teaching of the world, or for the teaching of Christ? Let him examine his past life, and he will see that he never once suffered from having followed the teaching of Christ; he will see that all the unhappiness of his life proceeded from his having, contrary to his own inclinations, followed the teaching of the world.

During my life, which has been an exceptionally happy one, according to the opinion of the world, I can remember so much suffering borne by me because of the teaching of the world, that it might have sufficed for the life of one of the greatest martyrs in the name of Christ. All the most trying moments of my life, from the orgies and debauches of my student days, to duels, war, and ill health – all the unnatural and painful conditions of life in which I now live – were and are but martyrdom because of the teaching of the world.

I speak of my life, which, as I say, has been an exceptionally happy one, according to the opinion of the world. But how many martyrs there are who have suffered, and still suffer, for the teaching of the world, whose sufferings I cannot even picture to myself!

We do not see the difficulty and peril there is in following the teaching of the world, only because we look upon all we bear for its sake as being absolutely necessary.

We have become convinced that all the misfortunes that we create for ourselves are indispensable conditions of life, and we cannot understand that Christ shows us the way to escape suffering and to attain happiness.

In order to examine the question, which life is a happier one, we must cast

aside all our mistaken notions, and examine all those around us and ourselves without any preconceived idea.

Pass through a crowd of people, especially those living in a town, and see their wearied, sickly, and anxious faces; then think of your own life, of the lives of those you know; think of all the unnatural deaths, all the suicides that you may have chanced to hear of, and ask yourself what led to all the despair and suffering that drove these men to commit suicide. And you will see that nine-tenths of the suffering there is in this life is borne because of the teaching of the world; that it is all unnecessary suffering that need not exist; that men are, for the most part, martyrs of the teaching of the world.

A short time ago, on a rainy Sunday in the autumn, I drove in an omnibus through the market place near Souhareva tower, in Moscow. For the space of half a mile the carriage made its way through a compact mass of people. From morning to evening thousands of human beings, the greater part of whom are ragged and hungry, prowl about here in the dirt, abusing, cheating, and hating each other. The same may be seen in all the market places of Moscow. These men will spend their evenings in taverns and public houses, and the night in their corners and dens. Sunday is the best day in the week for them. On Monday, in their infected dens, they will again set to the work that they are heartily sick of.

Reflect what the lives of all these men and women are; think of all they have left, of the hard work to which they have voluntarily condemned themselves; and you will see that they are true martyrs.

These men have left their homes and fields; they have left their fathers, brothers, wives, and children; they have forsaken all, and have come into the town to procure what the teaching of the world forces each to consider as indispensable. And not only these thousands and thousands of miserable beings who have lost all, and now live from hand to mouth on tripe and brandy, but all, I say, from workmen, cabmen, seamstresses, and harlots, to rich merchants, bureaucrats, and their wives, lead the hardest, most unnatural lives, and yet fail to attain what is considered necessary according to the teaching of the world.

Tell me whether you can find among all these men, from the beggar to the

rich man, a single man who finds that what he earns is sufficient for all that he considers as indispensably necessary, and you will not find one in a thousand. Each struggles to get what he does not of himself require, but what is considered requisite by the world, and the want of which, therefore, makes him miserable. No sooner has he attained it, than more and more is required, and so this labor of Sisyphus goes on without intermission, ruining life after life. Take, in an ascending scale, the fortunes of men, from those who spend thirty rubles a year to those who spend fifty thousand, and you will seldom find a man who is not tormented and worn out with his efforts to obtain four hundred if he has but three hundred, five hundred if he has four, and so on without end. There is not one who, having five hundred, would voluntarily exchange with him who has but four hundred. Each strives to lay a still heavier burden on his already heavy-laden life, and gives up his whole soul to the teaching of the world. Today a man has earned an overcoat and galoshes; tomorrow he gets a watch and a chain; then a lodging with a comfortable sofa, carpets in the drawing room, and velvet clothes; then he buys a house, horses, pictures in gilt frames; and then, having overworked himself, he falls ill and dies. Another continues the same career, likewise sacrificing his life to the same Moloch, dying in the same way, without knowing why he does all this. Well, but perhaps, with all this, men are happy.

What are the principal requisites for earthly happiness, those that no one can deny? The first condition essentially necessary for happiness has always been admitted by all men to be a life in which the link between him and nature is not destroyed – that is, a life in the open air, in the sunshine, in communion with nature, plants and animals. Men have always considered being deprived of this as the greatest misfortune that could befall them. Prisoners feel this privation above all others. And now consider what the life of those who live according to the teaching of the world is. The more successful their worldly career is, the further they are from all that is true happiness. The higher the worldly prosperity they have attained, the less sunshine do they enjoy, the fewer are the fields, woods, and animals they see. Many, indeed almost all, women dwelling in towns live to old age without having seen the rising of the sun more than once or twice in their lives. They have never seen the fields and woods, except through the

windows of their coaches or of railway carriages; not only have they never brought up and tended cows, horses, or poultry, but also they have no idea even how animals grow and live. These people see stuffs, stones, and wood worked by human hands, and do not even see them in the light of the sun, but in an artificial light. They hear the noise of machinery, cannons, or musical instruments; they inhale strong scents and tobacco smoke; their enfeebled digestions crave stimulating food that is neither fresh nor savory. Nor are they nearer to nature even when traveling from one place to another. They travel shut up in boxes. Wherever they go, be it into the country or abroad, the same curtains hide the light of the sun from their eyes; footmen, coachmen, and watchmen prevent all communication between them and nature. Wherever they go they are, like prisoners, deprived of this condition that is so necessary for happiness. As prisoners find consolation in a blade of grass that grows in the yard of their prison, or a spider, or a mouse, so do these men and women find consolation, from time to time, in keeping half withered plants on their window sills, or in parrots, lap dogs, or monkeys, the care of which they leave to others.

A second indubitable condition necessary for happiness is labor – congenial, free labor, physical labor, which gives a man a good appetite and sound, invigorating sleep. And, again, the greater the prosperity a man has attained, according to a worldly estimate, the further he is from this second condition, essentially necessary for happiness. All the ‘fortunate’ of this world, the great dignitaries and rich men, are either as completely deprived of labor as prisoners are, and struggle unsuccessfully against ill health, which is the result of the absence of physical labor, and still more unsuccessfully against the ennui to which they are a prey (I say ‘unsuccessfully,’ for work is a source of pleasure only when it is necessary), or they have work to do that they hate, as, for instance, our bankers, attorneys, generals, and bureaucrats. I say it is work they hate because I never yet met one among them who liked his work, and who found as much pleasure in it as a stable boy does in clearing away the snow before his master’s house. All these so-called fortunate beings have either no work to do or work that they hate; they are, indeed, in much the same position as a galley slave.

A third condition essentially necessary for happiness is family life. And again, the further advanced men are in worldly prosperity, the less accessible that

happiness is for them. Most of them are adulterers, and voluntarily renounce all family ties. Even if they are not adulterers, they consider children as a burden rather than a joy, and try by all possible means to make their unions sterile. If they have children, they take no joy in them. They are obliged to confide them to others, for the most part to complete strangers; at first they are left to the care of foreign nurses or governesses, then sent to some government school, and the children grow up as miserable as their parents<sup>7</sup>, and often have but one feeling toward their parents: the wish for their death, that they may inherit their property. These men are not prisoners, but the result is more painful than that entire separation from all family ties to which a prisoner is condemned.

A fourth condition essentially necessary for happiness is a free, friendly communication with all men. And again, the higher the step on which a man stands in the world, the further he is from this condition. The higher your position, the narrower and closer is the circle of men with whom you can have any communication, and the lower in intellectual and moral development are the few persons who form this spellbound circle, out of which there is no escape. The whole world is open to the peasant and his wife. If one million men refuse to have anything to do with him, there are eighty million working men left like himself, with whom, from Archangelsk to Astrachan, he enters immediately into the closest, most brotherly communication, without waiting to be called upon or introduced. There are, for a functionary and his wife, hundreds of men who are their equals; but their superiors do not admit them into their circle, and they are cut off from all the lower classes. There may be ten fashionable families for a rich man of the world and his wife, but they are cut off from all the rest. Bureaucrats and very wealthy men and their families may find about ten friends as important and as rich as themselves. The circle of emperors and kings is still more restricted. Isn't that called solitary confinement, when a prisoner can only have communication with two or three jailers?

The fifth and last condition essentially necessary for happiness is health and a painless death. And again, the higher a man stands on the social scale, the further he is from it. Take, for instance, a moderately rich man and his wife, and a well-to-do countryman and his wife; in spite of hunger and the hard

work – which is the peasant's lot through the inhumanity of others, and not through any fault of his own – you will find, if you compare the two, that the lower men stand on the social scale the healthier they are, and the higher they stand the weaker they are in health. Recall to your minds all the rich men and their wives whom you have ever known, and those whom you know at present, and you will see that they almost all suffer from ill health. A healthy man among them – one who does not take medicine continually, or at least periodically every summer – is as great an exception as is a sick man among the working classes. Almost all the 'fortunate beings' are toothless, gray haired, or bald at the age when a working man is still in the full vigor of his manhood. They are almost all sufferers from nervous diseases, dyspepsia or worse, from over-eating, from drunkenness or depravity; and those who do not die young spend half their lives under medical treatment, using frequent injections of morphine, and becoming shriveled cripples, unable to maintain themselves; living on like parasites. Think of what the deaths of these men are: one has shot himself, another's body has rotted from disease, another again has died in his old age from a too frequent use of medicines; one has died in a drunken fit, another of gluttony, etc. All perish, one after the other, for the world's sake. And the crowd crawls after them like martyrs in search of suffering and death.

One life after another is cast under the wheels of their god; the carriage drives on, tearing lives to pieces, and again and again fresh victims fall under its wheels, with groans, wails, and curses.

It is difficult to live as Christ enjoins! Christ says, 'He who will follow me must leave houses, fields, and brethren, and he shall receive a hundredfold more than houses, fields and brethren in this world, and shall, besides, have life eternal.' And none follow him. The world says, 'Leave your home and your brothers; leave the country to live in a corrupt town; pass your whole life either as a servant in a bath-house, soaping other people's backs with vapor bath; or as a clerk, counting other people's money; or as an attorney general, spending your life in courts of law, busied with various documents, in order to make the fate of the miserable more miserable still; or as a bureaucrat, hastily signing useless papers all your life; or as a commander-in-chief, killing your brethren. Lead a wicked life, the end of which is always a painful death, and you shall suffer in this life, and not attain eternal life' –



and all go the world's way. Christ says, 'Take up your cross, and follow me,' by which he means, 'Bear the fate allotted you humbly, and submit to me, your God' – and none do so. But the first lost man, wearing an epaulet, and fit for nothing but murder, who says, 'Take up, not the cross, but your knapsack and your sword, and follow me to suffering and certain death,' is instantly obeyed.

Leaving their parents, their wives and children, they go in their buffoon attire, blindly submissive to some superior whom they hardly know; cold, hungry, worn out by a march above their strength, they follow him like a herd of oxen to the slaughter. But they are not oxen – they are men! They cannot help knowing that they are driven to slaughter, with the unsolvable question, 'Why must I go?' And with despair in their hearts they go on, many dieing off through cold, hunger, and infectious diseases, until those who are left are placed under bullets and cannon balls, and ordered to kill men whom they know nothing about. They kill and are at last killed themselves, and not one of those who kill their fellow- creature knows why he does so. The Turks roast them alive; they flay them; they tear out their bowels. And no sooner does anyone call than others go to the same dreadful suffering and to death. And nobody finds it hard. Neither do they themselves think it hard, nor do their fathers and mothers think so; the latter even advise their children to go. Not only do they think it necessary and unavoidable, but even perfectly right and moral.

We might think the fulfilling of Christ's teaching difficult if it were really an easy and pleasant thing to live according to the teaching of the world. But it is much more difficult, dangerous, and painful to do so than it is to live up to the teaching of Christ.

It is said that formerly there were martyrs for Christianity, but these were exceptional cases; we reckon about three hundred and eighty thousand voluntary and involuntary martyrs for Christianity in the course of 1800 years. Now count those that have died for the teaching for the world, and for each martyr for Christianity you will find a thousand martyrs for the world's sake, martyrs whose sufferings were a hundredfold more dreadful. Thirty million have been killed in war during the present century alone.

Those were all martyrs for the world's sake. Had they but rejected the

teaching of the world, even without following the teaching of Christ, they would have escaped suffering and death.

Were a man but to act as he finds best for himself, were he but to refuse to go to war, he would have to dig ditches; but he would not be tortured in Sebastopol or Plevna. Let a man not believe that it is indispensable to wear a watch chain and to have useless drawing rooms, let him but understand that all the foolish things the world teaches him to consider as indispensable are but useless trash, and he will not work beyond his strength; he will not have to endure suffering and constant care; he will not have to labor without purpose or rest; he will not be deprived of communion with nature, or of the work he loves, or of his family or his health, and he will not die a uselessly painful death.

We need not be martyrs for Christ's sake; that is not what he requires of us. But he teaches us to cease making ourselves martyrs for the sake of the false teaching of the world.

The teaching of Christ has a deep metaphysical purpose; it has a purpose general to all humanity; the teaching of Christ has the simplest, clearest, most practicable purpose for each of us. We may express this idea in a few words. Christ teaches men not to act foolishly. In this lies the simplest sense of Christ's teaching, and it is one each has it in his power to understand.

Christ says, 'Never give way to angry feelings, nor consider another as worse than yourself; it is foolish. If you give way to anger, if you abuse others, it will be worse for you.' Christ says, too, 'Do not lust after all women, but take one to you, and live with her; it will be better for you.' He says, likewise, 'Make no promise, lest you be forced to act foolishly and wickedly.' He says, likewise, 'Never return evil for evil, for it will fall back upon you.' Christ says, 'Consider no men as strangers to you because they live in other lands and speak in other tongues than you do. If you consider them as your enemies, they will do the same with respect to you, and it will be worse for you. Do not act thus, and it will be better for you.'

Yes, but as the world is organized it is more difficult to resist it than to live up to its precepts. If a man refuses to become a soldier he will be imprisoned, and possibly shot. If a man does not assure his future by

acquiring property for himself and his family, they will all starve. People say so in order to defend the social organization of the world, but they do not think so themselves. They say so only because they cannot deny the justice of Christ's teaching, which they pretend to believe in, and they must justify themselves in some way for not fulfilling it.

Christ calls people to the spring that is near them. People suffer from thirst, eat mud, and drink each other's blood; but their teachers have told them that they will suffer more if they go to the spring toward which Christ calls them, and men believe them rather than Christ, and suffer and die of thirst when they are but a few steps from the spring, and dare not approach it. But if we believed in Christ, if we believed that he came to bring bliss on earth, if we believed that he offers us, who are thirsting, a spring of living water, if we drew near to it, we should see how craftily we are deceived by the Church, and how senseless it is to suffer as we do, when salvation is so near. Accept the teaching of Christ in all its sublime simplicity, and the grievous deception in which you all live will grow clear to you.

We labor, generation after generation, to secure our lives by violence and the consolidation of property. We think that our happiness depends upon power and property. We are so used to that idea that the teaching of Christ – which teaches us that the happiness of man does not lie in wealth, that a rich man cannot be happy – seems to us to require some great sacrifice for the sake of future bliss. And yet Christ does not call upon us to make any sacrifice; his teaching does not tend toward making our present lives worse for us, but better. Christ in his infinite love teaches men to forbear from trying to assure their lives by violence, from caring about riches, just as philanthropists teach men to forbear from quarrelling and drunkenness. Christ says that if men live without resisting evil, and without riches, they will be happier, and he confirms his teaching by his own life. He says that he who lives according to his teaching must be ready to die at any moment of his life, either of cold or hunger, and cannot call a single hour of his life his own. And so it seems that Christ requires great sacrifices of us; yet it is but a general assertion of the inevitable condition of each man. The follower of Christ must always be ready to suffer and to die. Isn't the follower of the world in the same position? We are so used to the deception we are in that we have come to consider all that we do for the imaginary security of our

lives – our armies, fortresses, medicines, property, and money – as indispensable for the welfare of our lives. We forget what happened to him who intended to build barns, in order to provide himself with riches for a long time. He died the same night. All we do for the security of our lives is but what the ostrich does when hiding its head in order not to see itself killed. We do worse, for in order to secure an uncertain life, for an uncertain future, we resolutely ruin our real lives in the actual present.

The deception lies in the false assumption that we can secure the welfare of our lives by a struggle with others. We are so used to this erroneous idea that we do not see all we lose. We lose even our lives. Our lives are swallowed up in the cares of this world, so that no real life is left.

Let us set aside all we have become so used to, and then we shall see that all we do for the imaginary security of our lives is not done to assure our welfare, but to make us forget that our life here is not secure, and that it never can be secure. The French take up arms in the year 1870 to assure their existence, and that leads to the destruction of hundreds and thousands of Frenchmen; and every nation that takes up arms does the same thing with the same result. The rich man thinks his money assures the welfare of his life, and the money attracts a robber who kills him. A man who is overly careful of his health seeks to assure it by taking medicine, and the medicine kills him by slow degrees; and even if it does not kill him, it deprives him of all vigor and makes him like the paralytic who hardly lived during thirty-five years, while waiting for the angel at the pool.

The teaching of Christ – that life cannot be assured, and that we must be ready for suffering and death every moment of our lives – is incontestably better than the teaching of the world, which says that we must strive to make our lives as comfortable as we can; it is better because, though the impossibility of avoiding death and the uncertainty of life are the same, yet, according to Christ's teaching, life is not wholly swallowed up in the idle employment of trying to ensure our own comfort, but is free, and can be given up to the only aim natural to it, namely, our own happiness in that of others. The follower of Christ will be poor. Yes, but he will enjoy the blessings given to him by God. We have come to consider the word 'poverty' as expressive of misery, yet it really is happiness. 'He is poor' means that he

does not live in a town, but in the country; he does not sit idly at home, but labors in the fields or the woods; he sees the sunshine, the sky, beasts, and birds; he need not take thought what he shall do to excite his appetite, to facilitate his digestion; but he feels hungry three times a day. He does not toss about on his soft pillows thinking how to cure himself of sleeplessness, but sleeps soundly after his work. He sees his children around him, and lives in friendly communion with men. The main point is that he is not obliged to do work that he hates, and he need not fear the future. He will be ill, suffer, and die as others do (and judging by the way the poor suffer and die, his death will be an easier one than that of the rich); but he will indubitably have led a happier life. We must be poor, we must be beggars, wanderers on the face of the earth (πτοχος means 'wanderer'); that is what Christ taught us, and without it we cannot enter the kingdom of God.

'But then we shall starve,' is the answer. Christ has given to us one short saying in reply to this observation, a saying that has been usually interpreted as justifying the idleness of the clergy. Matthew 10:10; Luke 10:7. 'Take neither money for your journey, nor two coats, nor shoes, nor a walking stick, because he who works is worthy of his meat. And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give; for the laborer is worthy of his hire.'

He who works (εξεστ) signifies literally, 'can and shall have food.' It is a very short saying, but he who understands it as Christ did, will never argue that if a man has no personal property he must die of hunger. In order to understand the saying clearly, we must renounce the idea that the dogma of the redemption has made habitual to us: that the happiness of man lies in idleness. We must re-establish in our minds the idea, natural to all unperverted men, that the necessary condition of happiness for man is labor, and not idleness; that every man must labor, that his life will be as wearisome and as hard without work as it is for an ant, a horse, or any other animal. We must cast aside the barbarous idea that the condition of a man who has an inexhaustible ruble in his pocket – a lucrative post, or some landed property that enables him to live in idleness – is a naturally happy condition. We must re-establish in our minds the idea of labor that all unperverted men have, and to which Christ referred when he said that 'the laborer is worthy of his food.' Christ never could have thought that men

would come to consider labor as a curse, and therefore he could not imagine a man who did not work, or who had no wish to work. It was an understood thing for him that all his followers labored, and he says that a man's labor feeds him. And if one man profits from the work of another man, he will feed him who works for him; and so he who labors will always have food. He will not be rich; but there can be no doubt of his having food.

The difference is that, according to the teaching of the world, labor is a man's service, for which he considers himself entitled to more or less food in proportion to the work he does; while according to the teaching of Christ labor is the necessary condition of life, and food is its inevitable consequence. Work is the result of food, and food is the result of work; it is an eternal cycle – one is the effect and the cause of the other. However hard hearted a man may be, he will feed his workman as he feeds his horse, and he will give the workman sufficient food to enable him to work.

'The human son came, not be ministered to, but to minister, and to give his soul as a ransom for many.' According to the teaching of Christ every man will lead a better life if he understands that his duty is not to get as much work as he can out of others, but to pass his own life in working for them. The man who acts thus, Christ says, is worthy of his hire, and he cannot fail to obtain it. By the words 'Man does not live to be ministered to, but to minister to others', Christ lays the foundation of what is to assure the material existence of man; and by the words 'he who works is worthy of his food' Christ sets aside the argument, so often used against the possibility of fulfilling his teaching, that he who does so will perish of hunger and cold. Christ shows that a man does not assure his own food by depriving others of it, but by making himself useful and necessary. The more useful he is, the more assured his existence will be.

In our present social adjustments, those who do not fulfill the law of Christ, but who are forced by poverty to work for their neighbors, do not starve. Then how can we say that those who do fulfill his commandments, who work for their fellow-creatures, will starve? No man can starve while the rich have bread. Millions of men in Russia possessing no property live by their work alone.

A Christian will be as sure of his daily bread among pagans as among

Christians. He works for others, consequently he is of use to them, and therefore he will be fed. A dog that is useful is fed and taken care of, then how can we think a human being will not be fed and taken care of?

But if a man is sick, he is of no use; he cannot work; no one will give him food, - say people why feel an urge to prove the fairness of the beastly life. They say so, but they act in a very different way. The very persons who deny the practicability of Christ's teaching, in fact fulfill it. They do not even cease feeding a sheep, an ox, or a dog that is ill, neither do they kill an old horse, but give it work proportionate to its strength; they feed their lambs, their sucking pigs, and puppies in expectation of deriving profit from them by and by, and will they not find reasonable work for an old and young, will they not raise people who will work for them?

Nine-tenths of the lower classes are fed, as beasts of burden are, by the one-tenth – by the rich and powerful of the earth. And however great the error may be in which this one-tenth lives, and however much they may despise the other nine-tenths, they never deprive the other nine-tenths of the food necessary for their sustenance.

Objection against the feasibility of the teaching of Christ, stating that if I will not acquire and store for myself, then nobody is going to feed my family, is true; but it is only true in regards to idle, useless, and therefore harmful people, which is the the majority of our wealthy class. Nobody is going to feed idle people except for their insane parents, because idle people are useless to anyone, even to themselves; but people-workers will be fed and raised by even the most evil people. Calves are brought up, and people is a much more useful work animal than a bull, as it was appreciated in the market of slaves. That's why children can never be left without care.

Man lives not in order to have others work for him, but in order to work for others himself. He who will work, will be feed.

This is the truth, confirmed by the life across the world.

Wherever man has worked, he has received food, as each horse receives its fodder. He is fed even though he works grudgingly, unwillingly, only caring to get his daily labor over as quickly as possible, or longing to earn as much as possible in order to get the upper hand of his master. Even he does not

remain without food, and he is happier than the one who lives by the labor of others. And how much happier would the man be who worked in accordance with the teaching of Christ, whose aim would be to work as much as possible, and to receive as little as possible! How much happier will his position be when there will be several around him, perhaps many such as he who will serve him in his turn.

The teaching of Christ about work and its fruit is shown in the story of the five and seven thousand men fed with two fish and five loaves. Man will attain the highest happiness possible on earth when each, instead of only caring about his own personal comfort, acts as Christ taught those assembled on the seashore to do.

It was necessary to feed several thousand men. One of the disciples said to Christ that a boy there had a few fish. The disciples had also a few loaves. Christ knew that some of those who had come from a distance had brought food with them and others had not. That many had brought provisions with them is evident from there being twelve basketfuls gathered of what remained, as we read in all the four gospels. (If nobody had had anything except the boy, there would not have been twelve baskets in the field.) Had Christ not done what he did, that is, the 'miracle' of feeding thousands with five loaves, what now takes place in the world would have taken place then. Those who had provisions with them would have eaten all they had and would have over-eaten rather than see that anything should be left. Misers would perhaps have taken the remainder home. Those who had nothing would have remained hungry, looking on with wicked envy at those who ate, and some would very likely have stolen from those who had provisions. Quarrelling and fighting would have ensued, and some would have gone home satisfied, the others hungry and cross; exactly what takes place in our present lives would have happened then.

But Christ knew what he meant to do; he told them all to sit in a circle and enjoined his disciples to offer a part of what they had to those next them, and to tell others to do the same. The result was that when all those who had brought provisions with them followed the example set them by the disciples, and offered their provisions to others, there was enough for all. All were satisfied, and so much remained that twelve baskets were filled.



Christ teaches men to act thus in all the circumstances of life, for this is the law of humanity. Labor is the necessary condition of life; and work is a source of happiness for man. But if a man keeps to himself the fruit of his own or others' work, he prevents its contributing to the general good of mankind. By giving up his work to others he acts for the good of all. We are accustomed to say,

'If men do not despoil each other they will starve.' Wouldn't it be more correct to say that if men despoil each other there will always be some who will starve, for that is the actual fact.

It does not matter if a man is a follower of Christ or a follower of the world; he is never entirely independent of others. Others have taken care of him, fed him, and still take care of him. But, according to the teaching of the world, man forces others to continue feeding him and his family by threats and violence. According to Christ's teaching, man is taken care of, brought up and fed by others; and he does not force others to continue feeding him, but tries to serve others in his turn, to do as much good as possible to all his fellow-creatures. Which life is then a truer, more rational, and happier one?

Is it a life in accordance with the teaching of the world, or in accordance with Christ's teaching?

## Chapter 11

The teaching of Christ establishes the kingdom of God on earth. To think that it is difficult to fulfill his teaching is unfair. It is not difficult; indeed, he who has once clearly understood it cannot do otherwise than fulfill it. The teaching of Christ is the only possible salvation of the inevitable destruction of the individual life. The fulfilling of Christ's teaching does not involve us in suffering; it really saves us from nine-tenths of the suffering that we must bear for the world's sake.

And, when I had understood this, I asked myself why I had never followed Christ's teaching, which leads to salvation and happiness, but had followed a contrary teaching that had brought me nothing but suffering. There could be but one answer to that question – the truth had been hidden from me.

When Christ's teaching first grew clear to me, I did not think my having understood it would lead me to renounce the teaching of the Church. It seemed to me only that the Church had not arrived at the conclusions that the teaching of Christ leads to; but I did not think that the new light, which was revealed to me, and the conclusions that I drew from it, would separate me entirely from the Church. Not once did I try during my researches to discover any error in the teaching of the Church; I intentionally closed my eyes to the views that seemed strange and ambiguous to me, as long as they did not absolutely contradict what I considered to be the basis of the Christian teaching.

But the further I advanced in the study of the gospel, and the clearer the purpose of Christ's teaching grew, the more inevitable it became for me to choose between the teaching of Christ, which was rational, clear, and in harmony with my conscience, and a teaching that was in direct opposition to it and that gave me nothing but the consciousness of my own peril and that of others. I could not help throwing each of the Church theses aside, one after the other. I did it most unwillingly, often struggling with my feelings, longing to soften the discordance between my reason and the teaching of the Church. But when I had ended my work, I saw that however hard I might try to keep something, at least, of Church teaching, nothing really was left for me.

As I was drawing toward the close of my work, it happened that my son, a boy, told me that two of our servants, perfectly uneducated men, who hardly knew how to read, had been disputing about a passage in some book, in which it was affirmed that it is no sin to kill criminals, or to kill men in war. I could not believe such a statement could have been published, and asked to see the book. It was An Exposition of the Book of Prayer, third edition (eightieth thousand), Moscow, 1879. I read page 163.

Q. 'What is the sixth commandment?'

A. 'You shall not kill.'

Q. 'What does God forbid by this commandment?'

A. 'He forbids our killing, that is, depriving a man of life.'

Q. 'Is it a sin to punish a criminal by death, according to the law, or to kill our enemies in war?'

A. 'It is no sin to do so. A criminal is put to death in order to put a stop to the evil that he does.

Enemies are killed in the war in which we fight for our sovereign and our country.'

These are the only words that explain why this commandment is repealed. I could hardly believe my own eyes.

The disputants asked my opinion upon the subject. I said to the one who maintained that the text was quite right that the interpretation was incorrect. 'Then how is it that incorrect statements are printed?' he asked. I could give him no answer. I kept the book and looked through it. The book contains: (1) prayers, with instructions concerning genuflections, and the way the fingers are to be joined in making the sign of the cross; (2) the interpretation of the Creed; (3) extracts from the fifth chapter of Matthew, without any explanations, in which the sayings contained in the chapter are, for some unknown reason, called the 'beatitudes'; (4) the Ten Commandments, with explanations that annul them; and (5) anthems for feast days.

As I have said, I had not only tried to avoid finding fault with the teaching of

the Church, but I had tried to view it in its best light, and had not sought to discover its weak points. Though well acquainted with its academic literature, I was completely ignorant of its books for the use of schools. The enormous circulation of a prayer book, which excited doubt even in ignorant men, struck me.

I could not believe that a prayer book, the contents of which were quite pagan, was the Church teaching, propagated among the people. In order to see if it were really the case, I bought all the books published by the Synod, or that it allowed to be published, in which there were short explanations of the Church Creed, for the use of children and uneducated people, and I read them.

The contents were almost new for me. At the time when I learned the Bible history and the catechism, these books did not exist. There was, at that time, as far as I can remember, neither any explanation of the beatitudes, nor were we told that to kill a fellow-creature is no sin. This was not to be found in the old Russian catechisms of Platon; neither is it to be found in the catechisms of Peter Moguilla, or of Beliakoff. It was an innovation made by Filaret, who likewise wrote a catechism for the military classes. The Exposition of the Book of Prayer was taken from that very catechism. The book that serves as the basis is A Complete Christian Catechism for the use of all Orthodox Christians, published by order of his Imperial Majesty.

The book is divided into three parts: on faith, hope, and love. The first part contains an analysis of the Nicene Creed. The second, an analysis of the Lord's Prayer, and of eight verses of the fifth chapter of Matthew, which form the introduction to the Sermon on the Mount, and which are, for some unknown reason, termed 'beatitudes.' Both of these sections treat the dogmas of the Church, prayers, and sacraments. The third part treats of the duties of a Christian. We do not find the commandments of Christ expounded in this part, but the Ten Commandments of Moses. These commandments are expounded in a way that seems to enjoin men to leave them unfulfilled, and to act contrary to them. In reference to the first commandment, which enjoins us to worship God alone, the catechism teaches us to worship angels and saints, as well as the Virgin Mary and the three persons of the godhead. (The Complete Catechism, pages 107, 108) In

reference to the second commandment, 'You shall not make for yourself any graven image,' the catechism teaches us to worship images (p. 108). In reference to the third commandment, 'You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain,' the catechism tells men it is their duty to take an oath every time the legal authorities may require it of them (p. 111). In reference to the fourth commandment, 'To keep holy the Saturday,' the catechism enjoins us to keep Sunday holy as well as thirteen great holidays and a number of smaller ones, and to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays (p. 112-115). In reference to the fifth commandment, 'Honor your father and your mother,' the catechism tells us it is our obligation and duty to honor our sovereign, our father-land, our spiritual pastors, and all those who are put in authority over us; and about three pages are taken up with the enumeration of the authorities we are to honor – schoolmasters, civil commanders, judges, military commanders, masters (sic) for those who serve and whose property they are (p. 116-119). I cite from the 64th edition of the catechism published in 1880. Twenty years have gone by since slavery has been abolished, and no one has taken the trouble to remove the sentence that was added to the commandment, 'Honor your father and mother,' in order to uphold and justify slavery.

With regard to the sixth commandment, 'You shall not kill,' men are taught from the very first lines to kill.

What does the sixth commandment forbid?

Murder; or taking away our neighbor's life in any way.

Is taking a man's life always illegal murder?

Murder is not unlawful, when it is our duty to take away a man's life; for instance:

When we punish a criminal by death.

When we kill the enemies in fighting for our sovereign and our native land.

And further on:

What other instances can you cite of murder?

... When a man harbors a murderer or sets him free.

And that is published in hundreds and thousands of copies, and instilled into the Russians by violence, by threats and fear of punishment, under the pretence of its being the Christian teaching. This is taught to the whole Russian nation. This is taught to innocent children, in speaking of whom Christ said, 'Allow little children to come to me, for theirs is the kingdom of God'; to children whom we must be like, in order to enter the kingdom of God; like them in knowing nothing of all this; to children, in speaking of whom Christ said, 'Woe to him who tempts one of these little ones.' And these children are made to learn this; they are told that it is the sacred law of God!

Such things are not proclamations secretly propagated, under fear of being sent to hard work in the mines; but they are proclamations, acting contrary to which leads men to hard work in the mines. While I write, a chill creeps over me at my daring to say what I must say – that we have no right to annihilate the commandments of God, which are written in all His laws and in all our hearts, by adding such words as 'duty,' 'our sovereign,' 'our fatherland,' etc., which explain nothing.

Yes, what Christ warned us against has come to pass, for he said (Luke 11:33-36, and Matt. 6:23), 'Take heed that the light that is in you is not darkened. If the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!'

The light that is in us has indeed become darkness; and that darkness is an awful one.

Christ said, 'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees; for you shut up the kingdom of God against men. For you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow others to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for you devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers; therefore you are still more guilty. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you search seas and lands to make one proselyte, and when you have done so, you make him worse than he had been before. Woe to you, blind guides!'

'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you build up the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchers of the righteous; and you suppose that if you had lived in the days when the prophets were martyred,

you would not have joined in shedding their blood. Then you are witnesses against yourselves, that you are no better than those who killed the prophets. Fill up then the measure begun by those like you yourselves. And behold, I will send to you wise prophets and scribes, and some of them you shall kill and crucify, and some of them shall you scourge in your synagogues and drive them from city to city. And may all the righteous blood shed since the days of Abel fall back upon your heads.

‘Every blasphemy may be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall never be forgiven.’

Isn't it as if this had been written only yesterday against those who now force men to accept their faith, and persecute and destroy all the prophets and just men, who try to bring their deception to light?

And I saw that though the Church calls its teaching a Christian teaching, it is in truth the very darkness against which Christ strove and enjoined his disciples to strive.

The teaching of Christ has two parts. First, it bears upon the life of each individual and upon our social lives; or it has an ethical mission. Second, it points out why men ought to live in the way it enjoins and not otherwise; or it has a metaphysical mission. One is the effect and, at the same time, the cause of the other. Man must live thus because such is the purpose of his creation; or the purpose of his creation is such, and therefore he must live thus. These two sides of every teaching are to be found in all the religions of the world. Such is the religion of Brahma, Confucius, Buddha, and Moses, and such is the religion of Christ. It teaches us how we are to live and explains why we are to live thus. But what befell all these other teachings has befallen the teaching of Christ also. Men have turned aside from it, and there are many who try to justify their having done so. Sitting down in Moses' seat, they explain the metaphysical part of the teaching in a way that makes the ethical requirements of the teaching no longer obligatory, and they replace them by outward worship, rites, and ceremonies. The same occurs in all religions, but it appears to me that never has the evil influence been so striking as in Christianity. It acted with peculiar force, because the teaching of Christ is the most sublime of all teachings; it is the most sublime just because the metaphysical and ethical parts of the teaching are so

indissolubly bound together, and so bear upon each other that it is impossible to separate one from the other without depriving the whole teaching of its true sense. The teaching of Christ is Protestantism by itself, for it rejects not only all the ritualistic observances of Judaism, but also every outward form of worship. This rupture in Christianity could have no other effect than to completely pervert the teaching and deprive it of all sense. And it did so. The rupture between the teaching of life and the exposition of how we are to live began with the sermon of Paul, who did not know the ethical teaching expressed in the gospel of Matthew, and who preached a metaphysically cabalistic theory, foreign to Christ. The rupture was definitely accomplished in the time of Constantine, when it was found possible to array the whole pagan course of life in Christian clothing, without any change, and then to call it Christianity. From the time of Constantine, the heathen of heathens, whom the Church has canonized for all his vices and crimes, began 'councils,' and the center of gravity of Christianity was transferred to the metaphysical side of the teaching alone. And this metaphysical teaching, with the rites that form part of it, losing more and more of its fundamental sense, reached its present point. It has become a teaching that explains the mysteries of life in heaven, and gives the most complicated rites for divine worship, but at the same time gives no religious teaching at all concerning life on earth.

All religious creeds, except that of the Christian Church, enjoin, besides the observance of certain rites, good deeds and forbearance from evil ones. Judaism requires circumcision, the keeping of the Sabbath, the bestowing of alms, the keeping of the year of jubilee, and many other things. Islam requires circumcision, daily prayers five times a day, the tenth part of a man's riches to be given to the poor, the adoration of the tomb of the prophet, and so on. We find the same in all other religions. Be the duties good or bad, they are deeds. Pseudo-Christianity alone exacts nothing of its followers. There is nothing that is obligatory to a Christian, if we exclude fast-days and prayers, which the Church itself does not consider as obligatory; there is nothing that he must refrain from. All that is necessary for a pseudo-Christian is never to neglect the sacraments. But the believer does not administer the sacraments to himself; others administer them to him. No obligation lies on the pseudo-Christian; the Church does all that is



necessary for him: he is baptized and anointed, the sacraments of Holy Communion and Extreme Unction are administered to him, his confession is taken for granted if he is unable to make it orally, prayers are said for him, and he is saved. From the time of Constantine the Church never required any deeds of its members; it never even enjoined a man to refrain from anything. The Christian Church acknowledged and consecrated all that had existed in the pagan world. It acknowledged and consecrated divorce, slavery, courts of law, and all the powers that had existed before, such as war and persecution, and only required evil to be renounced at baptism in word.

The Church acknowledged the teaching of Christ in word, but denied it in deed.

Instead of pointing out to the world what life ought to be, the Church expounded the metaphysical part of Christ's teaching in a way that required no duties, and did not hinder people from living on as they had lived before. The Church, having once given way to the world, followed it ever after. The world organized its existence in direct opposition to the teaching of Christ, and the Church invented metaphors according to which it appeared that men who really lived contrary to the law of Christ lived in accordance with it. And the world began to lead a life that rapidly grew worse than that of the pagans, and the Church began to justify this way of living and to affirm that it was strictly in accordance with the teaching of Christ.

But a time came when the light of the true teaching, which lies in the gospel, penetrated among the people in spite of the Church, which had tried to conceal the teaching by forbidding the translation of the Bible; the time came when this light penetrated among the people through so-called sectarians, and even through free-thinkers, and then the falsity of the Church teaching grew evident to all, and men began to change their former lives and live up to that teaching of Christ that had reached them independently of the Church.

Thus men annihilated slavery, which had been justified by the Church; annihilated religious executions, which had been sanctioned by the Church; annihilated the power of sovereigns and popes, which had been consecrated by the Church; and now the turn of property and kingdoms has come. The

Church never rose in defense of anything, and cannot do so, because the annihilation of these false principles of life is based on the Christian teaching that the Church has preached and still preaches.

The teaching of life has emancipated itself from the Church, and has established itself independently of it.

The Church retains the right to interpret Christ's teaching; but what interpretation can it give? The metaphysical explanation of the teaching has weight only when it explains what life is, or ought to be. But no such teaching is left to the Church. It could only speak of the life that it had organized of old, which is now no more. If any of the old interpretations remain, as, for instance, when the catechism tells us that we must kill when it is our duty to do so, nobody believes them; and nothing is left to the Church but its temples, images, brocades, and words.

The Church has carried the light of the Christian teaching of life through eighteen centuries; and while trying to conceal it in its raiment it has been burnt itself in this light. The world, with its social adjustments consecrated by the Church, has now thrown the Church aside in the name of the same Christian truths that the Church unwillingly carried along with it, and the world now lives without it. The Church is done with, and it is impossible to conceal the fact. All those who really live, and do not drearily vegetate, in our European world have left the Church. And let no one say that it is so rotten in Western Europe; our Russia, with its millions of rationalists Christians, educated and uneducated, having abandoned the Church doctrine, undeniably proves that it, in the sense of falling away from the Church, thank God, much more 'rotten' than Europe.

All living beings are independent of the Church.

State power is holding on tradition, on science, on national election, on brute force, you name it, only not on Church.

Wars and relations between countries are established on the principle of nationalities, equilibrium, anything else but the Church. Government agencies directly ignore Church. The idea that the Church could be the foundation for the court, the property, in our time, is just ridiculous. Science is not only not conducive to the Church's doctrine, but inadvertently,

unintentionally in its development is always hostile to the Church. Art, which at first served the Church alone, now has separated from it. Not only the whole life has emancipated from the Church, the life has no relationship to the Church other than contempt, while the Church tries to remind its former rights. If there is a form that we call Church, it's just because people are afraid to break up the vessel that kept a valuable content once; only this can explain the existence in our century of Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and various Protestant Churches.

All Churches, whether Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant, are like sentinels keeping guard over a captive, while the captive has escaped and even walks about among the sentinels. All that now forms true 'life' in the world, Socialism, Communism, theories of political economy, utilitarianism, liberty and equality, all the moral opinions of men, all that governs the world and that the Church considers to be inimical to it, is a part of the very teaching the same Church unwittingly brought in together with the teaching of Christ that it tried to conceal.

The life of the world in our time follows its own course, independently of the teaching of the Church. That teaching has remained so far behind that men of the world hearken no more to the voices of the teachers; and, indeed, there is nothing worth listening to, because the Church only gives explanations that the world has already grown tired of – explanations of an organization that is rapidly decaying.

Certain men set out in a boat, while a man at the helm steered. He was a skilful pilot, and the boat glided rapidly on; but a time came when a less skilful helmsman took his place. Finding the latter incapable of steering well, those in the boat first ridiculed him and then drove him away. That would not have mattered much if the men had not forgotten, in their anger against the useless helmsman, that without one they would not know in what direction they were going. So it was with our Christian world. The Church does not stand at the helm any more; we row rapidly on, and all the progress of knowledge on which our nineteenth century prides itself is only the result of our floating without a helmsman. We do not know where we are going. We go on leading our present lives absolutely without knowing why we do so. And yet it is as unreasonable to live without knowing why we

do so as it is to set off in a boat without knowing to where we are bound.

If people did nothing themselves, but by some outward power were placed to the current condition, then they might answer the question, 'Why are you in such a condition?' by saying that they did not know why. We do not know, but we happen to be in this condition. But people make their own conditions for themselves, for each other, and especially for their children, and they must therefore be able to answer when asked why they assemble into armies, to cripple and to kill each other; why they waste the immense strength of millions in erecting useless and pernicious cities; why they organize their petty courts of law, and send men whom they call criminals out of France to Cayenne, out of Russia to Siberia, and out of England to Australia, while knowing that it is senseless to act thus. When they are asked why they leave the fields and woods they love to work in factories and sweatshops that they hate; why they bring up their children to lead the same lives though they disapprove of them; they ought to be able to give some reason for their conduct. Even if all this were pleasant, people should be able to give their reasons; but when it is the hardest possible work, when people groan over it, how can they go on acting in this way without trying to find adequate reasons. People have to either stop doing all this or to answer why they do it.

People never have lived without trying to solve these questions; people cannot live without making the attempt. And people always had the answer.

The Jew lived as he lived – he made war, he executed people, he built temples, he organized his life thus and not otherwise – because it was enjoined him by the Law, which, according to his conviction, came from God Himself. It is thus likewise with the Hindus and the Chinese, it was thus with the Romans and the Muslims, it was thus with the Christians a hundred years ago, and it is thus now with the ignorant crowd. The unthoughtful Christian now solves these questions in this way: soldiery, war, courts of law, and executions exist according to the commandments of God, transmitted to us by the Church. The Church teaches that the world, as we know it, is a lost world. All the evil that fills it exists only by the will of God as a punishment for the sins of men, and therefore we must submit to it. We can only save our souls by faith, by the sacraments, by prayer, and by

submission to the will of God. The Church teaches us that each must submit to the sovereign, who is the anointed of God, and to those who are in authority over us; that each must defend his own property by violence, make war, and execute or be executed according to the will of the authorities placed over him by God.

It does not matter if this explanation good or bad, it formerly explained all the various phases of life to the believing Christian, and man did not renounce his own reason while living according to the law that he acknowledged as divine. But now the time has come when only the most ignorant believe in this, and even their number decreases with every day and every hour of the day. There is no possibility of stopping this progression. All eagerly follow those who are in front, and all will soon reach the point where the foremost now stand. But the foremost are standing upon the brink of an abyss. The position of the foremost is an awful one. They point out the path to those who are to follow them, and are themselves completely ignorant both of what they are doing and of the things that impel them to act as they do. There is not one man among them who could now answer the direct question, "Why do you lead the life that you lead?" 'Why do you do what you do?' I have addressed such questions to hundreds of men, and have never received a direct reply. Instead of a plain answer to the question, I always received an answer to some question that I had not asked.

Whenever I asked a Catholic, Protestant, or Orthodox believer why he lived as he did – so contrary to the teaching of Christ, which he professed – instead of a direct answer, each would begin to talk of the lamentable want of faith of the present generation, of the wicked men who propagate irreligion, and of what awaited the Church in future. But the answer why the man did not do what his creed enjoined was never given to me. Instead of answering about himself he would speak of the general state of mankind, and of the Church, as if his own life was of no importance whatever, and as if he were engrossed by the idea of saving all mankind, and especially the institution called 'the Church.'

A philosopher, whether an idealist, a spiritualist, a pessimist, or a positivist, would answer the question of why he did not live according to his

philosophical teaching by talking of the progress of mankind and of the historical law of that progress, thanks to which mankind was rapidly advancing toward perfect happiness. But he would never give a direct answer to the question, why he himself, in his own life, did not fulfill what he considered rational. The philosopher, like the believer, seems to be taken up with observing the general laws of all humanity rather than with the ordering of his own individual life.

If you ask an average man, a representative of the great majority of the civilized men who are half believers, half unbelievers, and who are all, without a single exception, dissatisfied with their own lives and with our social adjustments, and who always foresee approaching ruin – such an average man, on being asked why he leads a life that he himself finds fault with, and why he does nothing to improve it, never gives you a direct answer and never speaks of himself, but turns the conversation to some general question about justice, trade, the state, or civilization. If he is a policeman or an attorney he will say, ‘And how are things to go on if, in order to better my own life, I take no part in the affairs of the country? How will trade progress?’ If he is a merchant he will say, ‘What progress will civilization make, if I do not cooperate in its advancement?’ Each speaks as if the problem of his life did not lie in attaining the happiness toward which he strives, but in serving the state, commerce, or civilization. The average man answers exactly as the believer and philosopher do. He answers a personal question by a general one; and the reason why the believer, the philosopher, and the average man retort by a general question is that not one of them has any true notion of life. And each of them really feels ashamed of his ignorance.

It is only in our Christian world that, instead of the teaching of life, the explanation of what our life ought to be – which is religion – there is only the explanation of why life must be such as it was of old; and the name of religion is given to a teaching that nobody needs. Nor is that all; science has acknowledged this same fortuitous, defective position of society as the law of all mankind. Learned men, such as Tillet, Spenser, and others, argue very seriously about ‘religion,’ understanding by the word the metaphysical teaching of the ‘origin of all,’ without suspecting that, instead of speaking of religion as a whole, they speak of only a part of it. But the life itself is left

without any definition.

Moreover, as always happens, science has recognized this random, ugly state of our society as the law of mankind. Scientists Thiele, Spencer, etc. discuss religion with all determination, yet they focus only on the metaphysical teachings about the beginning of everything and have no idea that they are considering not the entire religion but only a part of it.

The result of all this is that, in our century, we see wise and learned men who are 'naively' convinced that they are devoid of all religion, only because they do not acknowledge the correctness of those metaphysical explanations that were, in some past time, given as explanations of life. The idea never occurs to them that they must live in some way or other, that they do live in some way or other, and that it is exactly the principle on which their lives are based that is their religion. These men imagine that they have very elevated convictions and no faith. But, whatever people may say, if they take any thoughtful actions, they have beliefs, because thoughtful actions are always defined by beliefs. The actions of these individuals are defined only by the belief that they always ought to do what they were told. The religion of these people, who do not recognize religion, is the religion of obedience to everything that makes a strong majority, that is, in short, the religion of obedience to the existing Government.

We may live according to the teaching of the world; we may lead an animal life without acknowledging anything higher and more obligatory than the decrees of the existing authorities. But he who lives thus cannot be said to live rationally. Before saying that we live rationally we must answer the question, 'Which teaching of life do we consider as a rational one?' Miserable beings that we are, we have no such teaching; we have even lost all consciousness of the necessity for gaining any rational teaching of life.

Ask people of our time, believers or unbelievers, what teaching they follow. They will have to confess that they follow only the laws written by the officials of the Second Section, or by the Legislative Assembly, and put in practice by the police. This is the only teaching that our European world acknowledges. They know that this teaching does not come either from heaven or from the prophets, neither was it taught by the sages. They blame the regulations of these officials and of the legislative assemblies but submit

to its executors, who are the police, and obey the most barbarous exactions without a murmur. The legislative assemblies have decreed, and officials have written, that each young man must be ready to submit to insult, death, and murder; and all the fathers and mothers who have grown-up sons obey that law, although this law was written yesterday by a sold-out minister and this law can be changed tomorrow.

But all notions of there being a law that is indubitably rational and that each feels in his inmost soul to be obligatory are so lost in our world that the existence of a law among the Jews, which defined the whole order of life, for them, a law that was rendered obligatory by the moral feeling of each, is considered as existing exclusively among the Jews. It is regarded as a peculiarity of the Jewish nation that they obeyed what they considered in their inmost souls to be the indubitable truth, received directly from God, and they knew it to be such because it was in unison with their conscience. The position of an educated man, a Christian, is considered to be a normal and natural one when he obeys what he knows was only written by despised men and is enforced by policemen, that is, when he obeys what he feels to be unjust and contrary to his conscience.

It was in vain that I looked in our civilized world for some moral principles of life that should be clearly expressed. There are none. There is even no consciousness of such principles being necessary. There is even a firm conviction that moral principles are unnecessary; and that religion only consists in words about a future life, about God, about certain rites that, as some say, are necessary for salvation, while others consider them as totally unnecessary, and say that life goes on independently of all rules – that all that is necessary is to obey passively. The main points of faith are the teaching of life and the explanation of what life is and ought to be. Of these the first is considered as unimportant and as having nothing to do with faith, while the second is only an explanation of a life that was, in some past time, together with some conjectures about the historical progress of life, and this is considered as the most important and serious point. In all that really enters into the life of man – for instance, how he is to live, is he to commit murder or not, is he to condemn his fellow-creatures or not, in what way he is to bring up his children – people submit without a murmur to the rule of others who know no more than they do themselves why they themselves



live as they do, and why they insist upon others living the same way.

And men consider such a life as rational, and are not ashamed of it!

The split between the definition of the faith that is named faith, and the faith that is named public, State life, have now reached the last degree, and the majority of civilized people stuck to the life with the only faith in policeman and governor.

This state of things would be awful, were it universal. Fortunately, there are people in our days, the best men of our time, who, dissatisfied with such a creed, have a creed of their own concerning the life that we ought to lead.

These people are considered as pernicious and dangerous unbelievers; and yet they are the only believers. They are believers in the teaching of Christ, or at least in a part of it.

These people often do not know the whole teaching of Christ. They do not properly understand it, and indeed they often reject the chief basis of the Christian faith, which is non-resistance of evil; but their faith in what life ought to be is derived from the teaching of Christ. However these people may be persecuted and slandered, they are the only people who do not passively submit to all that they are ordered to do, and therefore they are the only people who do not vegetate, but lead a rational life, and they are the only true believers.

The link between the world and the Church, which gave meaning to the world, grew weaker and weaker, according as the content, the juices of life, flowed more and more into the world.

This is the mysterious process of birth; it is going on in front of our eyes. And now the last link that bound us to the Church is breaking, and an independent process of life is beginning.

The teaching of the Church, with its dogmas, councils, and hierarchy, is unquestionably bound up with the teaching of Christ. This connection is just as obvious as the relationship of a newborn baby with the womb of its mother. But just as umbilical cord and placenta after birth become the unnecessary pieces of meat, that, out of respect for what was stored in them, must be gently buried in the ground, the same way the Church

became an unnecessary, outdated organ, which, only out of respect to what it was before, should be hidden somewhere far away. Once breathing and blood circulation is established, the connection, formerly being the source of food, becomes an obstacle. And insane are the efforts to keep this link and to try to feed the newborn child through the umbilical cord instead of feeding the child through its mouth and let it use its lungs.

But the release of a baby from its mother's womb does not start an independent life. The life of a baby depends on the establishment of new nourishing bond with its mother. The same should happen with our Christian world. The teaching of Christ bore our world and gave birth to it. The Church, one of the organs of the teaching of Christ, has accomplished its purpose and became redundant, became a hindrance. The world cannot be ruled by the Church, but also getting rid of the Church does not yet render the life to the world. Its life will only start when it will realize its powerlessness and will feel the need for a new nourishment. And this is what must occur in our Christian world: it must cry out of its helplessness; only the consciousness of its helplessness, consciousness of the impossibility of nourishing itself the former way and the impossibility of using any other way of nourishment than its mother's milk, will deliver it to the mother's breast, already overfilled with milk.

What happens with our so overconfident, brave, decisive on the outside and yet, inside the consciousness, frightened and bewildered European world, is the same as what happens with a newborn child: he rushes, shouts, cries, gets angry, and can't understand what he needs to do. It feels that the previous source of nourishment has dried up, but doesn't know yet where to look for a new one.

A newborn lamb moves its eyes and ears, shakes its tail, jumps, kicks. We see its determination and it seems to us that he knows everything, but this poor thing knows nothing. All its determination and energy is the fruit of its mother's juices, the transmission of which has ceased and cannot be resumed. It is in a blissful and, at the same time, desperate situation. It's full of freshness and strength; but the calf will be gone if it doesn't get to suck its mother's nipples.

It is thus with our European world. See what a complicated, seemingly

rational, energetic life there is in our European world. It looks like all these people know all they are doing and why they are doing this. Take a look at how decisively, youthfully, energetically they act. Art, science, trade, and social activity – all are full of life. But all this only lives because its mother has recently fed it, by means of umbilical cord. There was Church that passed the rational teaching of Christ to the world. Every manifestation of life was nourished by it, grew, and have grown up. The Church has done its business, and has withered away. All the organs of the world are full of life, but the source of their former nourishment is stopped, and they have not found a new one. They seek it everywhere, but only not at their mother from which they have just separated. They, like the newborn lamb, still use the previous food, but have not yet come to understand that the food again can be only found at their mother, and can be transmitted to them, only in a different way.

The world now has to comprehend that the former unconscious process of nourishment has outlived its time, and that a new, conscious process of nourishment is necessary.

This new process consists in admitting those truths of the Christian teaching that had formerly flowed into the world through the medium of the Church, and that are the sources of life. People must again lift up the light that was hidden from them, and they must place it high before themselves and others and consciously live in that light.

The teaching of Christ as a religion that defines life, and gives an explanation of human life, stands now as it did 1800 years ago before the world. But before, the world had the interpretations of the Church, which, while hiding the teaching from their eyes, seemed to suffice for its life; but now the time has come when the Church has served its time and the world has no one to explain to it the problem of its new life, and feeling its helplessness, must accept the teaching of Christ.

Christ teaches us, first of all, to believe in the light while the light is in us. Christ teaches men to place this light of reason above all else, to live up to it, and not to do what they themselves acknowledge to be irrational. If you consider it irrational to kill Turks or Germans, do not do so; if you consider it irrational to force poor creatures to work hard, in order that you may wear

fine hats or have fine drawing rooms, do not do so; if you find it an irrational proceeding to shut up those who have been depraved by idleness in a prison, in this way to condemn them to the worst possible company and to complete idleness, then do not do so; if you think it irrational to live in an infected town when you can live in the fresh fields, do not do so; if you consider it irrational to make your children study the dead languages more than they do anything else, then do not do so. Only don't do what our European world does now: to live the life they don't consider reasonable, to commit acts they don't consider reasonable, not to believe their own mind, to live in discord with it.

The teaching of Christ is 'light.' The light shines. It is impossible not to accept the light when it shines. It is impossible to argue with it; it is impossible to disagree with it. It is impossible to refuse the teaching of Christ because it encompasses all the errors in which people live, and, like the ether, which those who study the philosophy of nature speak of, it penetrates all. The teaching of Christ is essential for each, whatever position he may be in. Christ's teaching must be accepted by people, not because it is impossible to deny the metaphysical explanation of life that it gives (we may deny all we choose), but because it alone gives us rules of life, without which mankind cannot live, if, at least, they wish to live as rational beings.

The power of Christ's teaching does not lie in the explanations it gives of the sense of life, but in the teaching of life that flows out of it. The metaphysical teaching of Christ is not new. It is a teaching that is written in the hearts of men and that all the truly wise men of the world preached. But the power of Christ's teaching lies in the practical application of this metaphysical teaching to life.

The metaphysical foundation of the teaching of the ancient Jews and of that of Christ is the same: 'love to God and love to our neighbor.' But the application of this teaching to life, according to Moses and according to the law of Christ, is very different. According to the Law of Moses it was necessary to fulfill 613 commandments, including some most senseless and cruel ones, all based upon the authority of the scriptures. According to the law of Christ the teaching that flows out of the same metaphysical basis is expressed in five rational commandments, which carry their own meaning

and their own justification along with them, and which embrace the life of all mankind.

The teaching of Christ would not be rejected either by Jews, Buddhists, Muslims, or others, even if they doubted the truth of their own creed; still less can it be rejected by our Christian world, which has no other moral law.

The teaching of Christ does not disagree with men in respect to their view of life, but, including it, gives them what is wanting in it, what is indispensable. It points out to them a path that is not a new one, but one familiar to them from their childhood.

You are a believer, whatever creed you may profess. You believe in the creation of the world, in the Trinity, in the fall and the redemption of man, in the sacraments, in the efficacy of prayer, or in the Church. Christ's teaching does not tell you that your creed is wrong; it only gives it what is wanting. While you keep to your present creed you feel that the life of the world and your own life are full of evil, and you see no way of escape from this evil. The teaching of Christ (obligatory to you, being the teaching of your God), gives you simple rules that will deliver you and others from that evil. Believe in resurrection from the dead, believe in paradise, in hell, in the pope, in the Church, pray as your creed enjoins you to do, keep the fasts, sing psalms, and all this does not prevent you from fulfilling what Christ tells you to do in order to attain true happiness, namely, avoid anger, do not commit adultery, do not swear, do not defend yourself by violence, never make war.

It may, perhaps, happen that you will not always fulfill all this. You will yield to temptation and transgress one of these laws, just as you violate the rules of the civil law or the laws of good breeding. You will, perhaps, in a moment of impulse, swerve from the rules laid down by Christ. But in your calmer moments do not act as you do now, do not organize your life in a way that renders it difficult to avoid anger and adultery, to abstain from swearing and using violence or making war; but organize it in a way that should make all these things difficult to do. You must admit the duty of acting thus, for these are the commandments of God.

You are, perhaps, an unbeliever or a philosopher. You say that all goes on in the world according to a law that you have discovered. The teaching of

Christ fully acknowledges the law that you have discovered. But, independent of this law, which will bring good to mankind after thousands of years, is your own individual life. Now you have no rules at all for your own individual life, except those written by people whom you despise, and enforced by the police. The teaching of Christ gives you rules that decidedly agree with your law, for your law of altruism is nothing but a bad periphrasis for the teaching of Christ.

Or you are neither a believer nor an unbeliever, you have no time to seek the purpose of life, and you have no definite creed; it is enough for you that you act as all others do. Then Christ's teaching says in effect to you, you are unable to verify the truth of the teaching that is preached to you – you find it easier to follow the example of those around you; but, however humble you may be in mind, you have a judge in your heart who sometimes makes you feel that you have acted rightly, and at other times shows you that you are wrong. However modest your lot may be, you cannot help sometimes asking yourself, 'Ought I to act as all around me do, or according to my own feeling?' And no sooner does the question arise in your mind than the commandments of Christ are found to answer both your reason and your conscience. These commandments will give you the answer, because they address your entire life; and the answer they will give will be in accordance with your reason and your consciousness. If you are more a believer than an unbeliever, you will act according to the will of God by following the precepts of Christ; if you are more a free-thinker than a believer, by following Christ's precepts you follow the most rational laws that ever existed in the world, as you will see yourself, because the precepts of Christ bear their own justification in themselves.

Christ says (John 12:31), 'Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out.'

He says likewise (John 16:33), 'These things I have spoken to you that in me you might have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.'

And it is in this way that the world, or the evil that is in the world, is overcome.

If a world of evil still exists, it exists only as something that is dead. It lives only by inertia; there is no force of life in it. It does not exist for him who believes in the commandments of Christ. It is conquered by the rational consciousness of the human son. The dispatched train is still running on in the same straight direction, but all the rational work is being done on it for already a long time to reverse its direction.

‘For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. The victory that overcomes the world is your faith’ (1 John 5:4).

The faith that overcomes the world is faith in the teaching of Christ.

## Chapter 12

I believe in the teaching of Christ, and the articles of my belief are as follows.

I believe that true happiness will only be possible when all people begin to follow Christ's teaching.

I believe that the fulfillment of this teaching is easy, possible, and conducive to happiness.

I believe that, even if it is left unfulfilled by all around me, if I have to stand alone among men, I cannot do otherwise than to follow it in order to save my own life from inevitable destruction, just as the choice would be obvious for someone who got caught in a burning house and found the door of escape.

I believe that, while I followed the teaching of the world, my life was a life of suffering, and that it is only by living according to the teaching of Christ that I can attain the happiness that the Father of life destined me to enjoy in this world.

I believe that this teaching gives blessing to the entire humanity, saves me from imminent perdition, and gives me the biggest blessing here. That is why I cannot not to follow it.

'The law is given through Moses; but happiness and truth are given through Jesus Christ' (John 1:17). The teaching of Christ is happiness and truth. When I did not know the truth I did not know true happiness. Thinking that evil was happiness, I fell into evil, and doubted if my long for happiness was legitimate. Now, I have understood and believed that the happiness for which I long is the will of the Father, and is the legitimate essence of my life. Christ says to me, 'Live for your happiness and for that of others, but do not believe in the snares – temptations (σκανδαλος) – that attract you by a semblance of happiness, while they, in reality, deprive you of it and entice you into evil. Your happiness is in your unity with all men. Do not deprive yourself of the happiness given to you.'

Christ taught me to live for the good, just not to believe those traps - the temptations that lure you by the likeness of the good, deprive you from good, and entangle you in evil. Your blessing is your unity with all people,



and evil is a violation the unity of the human son. Do not deprive yourself from the blessing that is given to you.

Christ has revealed to me that love toward all people is not only a duty that we must all strive after, as I thought before, but that in it lies true happiness – a happiness as natural to men as it is to children, as he says; and it is innate in all people until it is affected by deceit, error, and temptation.

Christ has not only revealed this to me, but has enumerated in his commandments all the temptations that draw me away from the state of unity, love, and happiness natural to man, and entice me into the snares of wickedness. The commandments of Christ show me how to escape the temptations that led me away from true happiness.

Happiness was given to me, and I have destroyed it. Christ's commandments reveal the snares that have destroyed my happiness, and therefore I cannot help endeavoring to avoid them. My creed is in this, and in this alone.

Christ has shown me that the first snare is enmity – anger. I believe this, and can, therefore, no longer harbor a feeling of enmity against any man. I can no longer pride myself upon my anger as I used to do, nor justify it to myself by thinking myself great and clever, and others insignificant and foolish. As soon as I remember that I am giving way to anger I can no longer refuse to acknowledge myself in the wrong, nor can I help seeking to be reconciled to those who are at enmity with me.

Nor is that all. As I know now that my anger is unnatural, harmful, and painful to me condition, I likewise recognize the temptation that led me into it. The temptation was my standing aloof from others, acknowledging only a few as my equals, and all the rest of the world as insignificant (racas) or foolish and ignorant (you fool!). I see now that these habits of holding myself aloof from others and considering them as fools (racas) were the chief causes of my enmity toward men. On recalling my past life to mind, I now see that I never once harbored a feeling of enmity toward those whom I considered my superiors<sup>8</sup>, and that I never intentionally wounded their feelings; that, on the contrary, the most trifling circumstances sufficed to excite my anger against a man whom I considered my inferior, and the more I considered myself above him the easier I found it to outrage him. But I

know now that he who humbles himself before others and who works for others is the only one who stands above the rest. I understand now that what is highly esteemed by people is abomination in the sight of God, why woe is foretold to the rich and famous, and why beggars and those who are humble are the blessed. Now I understand this and believe in this, and my understanding of this has changed my view of all that is good and noble or bad and base in life. All that had formerly seemed good and noble in my eyes – such things as honor, glory, education, riches, all the refinements of life, elegant furniture, good food, fine clothes, etc. – have grown worthless to me. All that had seemed bad and base – such things as obscurity, poverty, rough manners, simplicity of furniture, of food, of clothes, etc. – have grown good and noble in my eyes. If, therefore, I now inadvertently give myself up to anger and wound another's feelings, I dare not, after a moment's serious reflection, yield to the temptation that deprives me of true happiness, union, and love, any more than a man can set a snare for himself in which he was once caught. I can no longer try to rise above other men and to separate myself from them, nor can I allow either rank or title for others or myself, except the title of 'man'. I can no longer seek fame or glory, nor can I help trying to get rid of my riches, which separate me from my fellow-creatures. I cannot help seeking in my way of life, in its surroundings, in my food, my clothes, and my manners to everything that connects me with the majority of people, and to avoid all that separates me from them.

Christ has shown me that the second temptation that destroys my happiness is 'lasciviousness,' 'lust' for a woman other than I bound myself to. Knowing this, I believe this is true, and therefore I cannot any longer acknowledge sexual lust to be natural and fine quality of a person, cannot justify it by my affection for beauty, by my ardor, or by shortcomings of my wife. As soon as I feel that I am giving way to my passions, I know myself to be in an unhealthy, unnatural state of mind, and try by all possible means to escape this evil.

And, knowing that sexual lust is an evil for me, I know, too, the temptation that used to lead me into it, and I can no longer yield to it. I know now that the chief cause of this temptation lies not in powerlessness of people to resist sexual lust but in the separation of men and women from those to whom they were once united. I know now that the forsaking of those to

whom men and women have been once united is the 'divorce' that Christ forbids, for it brings depravity into the world. On recalling my past life, I see clearly that it was not only the crazy upbringing I had received that had encouraged my lasciviousness, by both physically and morally exciting my passions and justifying them by all the refinements of wit, but the chief temptation ensnaring me was my having forsaken the woman with whom I had first been united, and the availability of separated women around me. I see now that the major force of the temptation was not in my lust but in the unsatisfied lust of both mine and of those separated women around me. I understood the full meaning of Christ's words, and saw that God had created man and woman in order that they might live in couples, and that what God had joined together should never be put asunder. I now see clearly that monogamy is the natural law of mankind and must never be broken. I understand the words that 'he who divorces his wife,' that is, the woman to whom he was first united, 'forces her to commit adultery,' and brings new evil into the world. My belief in this has changed my former estimate of what is good and noble or bad and base in life. The things that I had formerly prized – a refined, elegant life and the passionate and poetic love extolled by all poets and artists – has become wicked and hideous in my eyes. On the contrary, a hard working, poor, simple life, which masters human passions, alone seems desirable. It is not our human institution of marriage that makes really lawful the union of man and woman. I consider as sacred and obligatory that union alone between a man and a woman which, once and forever, cannot be broken without violating the will of God.

I can no longer give way to idleness and an easy life, which always tends to excite inordinate desires, nor can I find pleasure in novel reading, poetry, music, or balls, which I had hitherto regarded, not only as innocent, but even as refined occupations. I cannot forsake my wife, for I now know that my doing so is a snare for others, for her, and for myself; I cannot cooperate in the idle and easy lives of other people; I cannot neither participate nor organize those entertainments that excite lusts – novel readings, theatres, operas, balls – and serve as snares for me and for others; I cannot support sexual liaisons of mature people without obligations; neither can I cooperate in the separation of any husband and wife; I cannot make distinctions between liaisons officially called marriages and the common-in-law ones.

Every union between a man and woman I consider to be sacred and binding to the end of their days.

Christ has revealed to me that the third temptation that destroys my happiness is the 'taking of an oath.' I believe it, and therefore I can't anymore, as I did before, myself swear to anyone in anything, and I can't anymore, as I did before, justify my oath taking by saying that it cannot harm anyone, that everybody is doing that, and that this is necessary for the State, and that it will be worse for me or others if I refuse to submit to this requirement. I know now that this is an evil for me and for people, and I can't do it.

I know, besides, wherein the temptation lay, which enticed me into this evil, and I dare not yield to it any more. I know that the temptation lies in our sanctioning deception. Men swear to submit to the commands of other men, whereas man must submit to God alone. The most awful evils in the world, by the consequences they entail, such as war, imprisonment, executions, and torture, only exist through this snare, by which all responsibility is taken off those who do evil. Upon pondering on lots of evil that made me condemn and not love people, - I see now that all of that was caused by oath taking – by recognizing the need to subjugate myself to the will of other people. I now understand the meaning of the words, 'All that is more than a simple affirmation or negation, yes or no, is evil.' Every promise is evil. Having understood this, I now see that the taking of an oath is against my own good, as well as the good of others; and the knowledge of that has altered my estimate of what is good and noble or bad and low. All that had seemed most good and noble to me before – obligatory allegiance to the government, the extortion of oaths from men, all the deeds conscience condemns that are mostly the result of a man's having taken an oath – look bad and low to me now. Therefore, I can no longer set aside the commandment of Christ, which says, 'Swear not at all.' I cannot now swear an oath, nor can I insist upon others doing so, nor can I support people to consider taking an oath as necessary or even harmless.

Christ has revealed to me that the fourth temptation, depriving me of my happiness, is 'resisting evil by violence.' I know that my doing so leads others and me into evil, and cannot therefore justify myself by saying that it is

necessary for the protection of others, of my property, or of myself. No sooner do I remember this than I cannot help abstaining from violence of every kind.

And I know, likewise, what the temptation is. It is the erroneous idea that my welfare can be secured by defending my property and myself against others. I now know that the greater part of the evil men suffer from arises from this. Instead of working for others, each tries to work as little as possible, and forcibly makes others work for him. And on recalling to mind all the evil done by others and myself, I see that it proceeded, for the most part, from our considering it possible to secure and better our conditions by violence. I now understand the meaning of the words, 'man is born, not to be ministered to, but to minister to others.' I now understand the saying, 'the laborer is worthy of his hire.' I now believe that my happiness, and that of all men, will only be attained when each labors for others and not for himself, when none refuses to labor for him who is in need of help. My belief in this has altered my estimate of good and evil, of honourable and dishonourable. All that I had formerly prized – such things as riches, property, honor, and self-dignity – have grown worthless in my eyes; and all I had formerly despised – such things as hard work, poverty, humility, the renunciation of property, and the renunciation of one's rights – have grown good and noble in my eyes. If I now feel tempted to defend others or myself, the property of others or my own, by violence, I can no longer give way to temptation, which ruins myself and others. I dare not amass riches for myself. I dare not use violence of any kind against my fellow-creatures, except, perhaps, against a child in order to save it from present harm; nor can I now take part in any act of authority, the purpose of which is to protect men's property by violence. I can neither be a judge, nor take part in judging and condemning, nor a manager, nor a participant in any management; neither can I support the participation of others in courts and management.

Christ has revealed to me that the fifth temptation, depriving me of well-being, is 'the distinction we make between our own and foreign nations.' I believe in this, and, therefore, if a feeling of enmity arises in my heart against a foreigner, I cannot help acknowledging, after a few moments' serious reflection, that the feeling is a wicked one; I can no longer justify this

feeling to myself by acknowledging the superiority of my own nation over others, or by the cruelty or barbarity of any other nation. I cannot help trying to be kinder and more friendly toward a foreigner than toward my own countrymen, rather than otherwise.

And knowing that the distinction I formerly made between my own and other nations is evil, I see the temptation that led me into this evil, and can no longer consciously let myself be drawn into it. It is the erroneous idea that my welfare is linked only with that of my native land, and not with that of all mankind. But I now know that my unity with other people cannot be destroyed by borders and statements of governments that I belong to such and such nation or country. I now know that people are equal everywhere and all are brothers. On recalling to mind all the evil that I did myself and that I suffered from others in consequence of the enmity that so often exists between different nations, it is clear to me that the cause was the gross imposition called 'patriotism' and the 'love to native land'. I can remember perfectly well that the feeling of enmity toward other nations, the assumption that a difference existed between them and myself, was not a feeling natural to me, but was grafted upon me by the senseless education given to me. But I now understand the meaning of the words, 'Love your enemies, do good to them.' You are all the children of one Father, therefore be like the Father; that is, make no distinction between people, treat all equally. I now see clearly that I can only attain happiness by recognizing my unity with all people of the world without exception. I believe in this. And this belief has completely altered my former estimate of what is good and noble or bad and low. All that I formerly prized as something worthy of respect – love for my native land, my people, my country, my service in military, which destroys other nations' wellbeing, military exploits of people - now seems not only pitiful but also hideous to me. The renunciation of the fatherland and cosmopolitanism, which I had formerly despised, now seems a noble thing to me. If, at a moment of oblivion, I tend to support Russian people more than foreign, wish success to the Russia or Russian people, at the moment of reasoning I can no longer serve that temptation, which is ruining me and all people. Can't recognize any States or nations. I can no longer take any part in quarrels between various nations, either in speech or by writing, nor especially by serving any government; neither can I take part

in any of the various administrations based on the difference of countries, either in custom-houses, in collecting taxes, in preparing ammunition or fire-arms, or in any activity relating to militarizing, or in military service; still less can I take part in war against other nations, just as I cannot support people doing that.

Having understood what is conducive to happiness, I can no longer do what deprives me of it.

I believe that I must live thus. I believe that it is only by living thus that I can find a rational purpose in life, which cannot be destroyed by death.

I believe that my rational life is the light given to me in order that it should shine before people, not in my words, but in my good deeds, so that people may glorify their Father (Matt. 5:6). I believe that my life and my knowledge of the truth are the talent given to me to work for it; that this talent is a fire, which is only a fire when it is burning. I believe that I am a Ninevite in relation to other Jonahs, from whom I have learned the truth, but that I am also Jonah in relation to other Ninevites, to whom it is my duty to reveal the truth. I believe that the only true purpose of my life is 'to live up to the light that is in me,' not to conceal it, but to set it high before people, that all should see it; and this belief gives me new strength to fulfill the teaching of Christ, and destroys all the obstacles that had formerly stood in my way.

All that had undermined my belief in the truth of Christ's teaching and had made it seem impracticable; all that had set me against it, such as having to endure privation, suffering, and death at the hands of those who do not know the teaching of Christ, is just what now confirms its truth in my eyes and attracts me toward it.

Christ has said, 'When you lift up the human son, all will be drawn up to me,' and I felt myself irresistibly drawn to him. He said, likewise, 'The truth will set you free,' and I felt completely free.

I used to think that enemies would come to make war or evil people would attack me, and if I did not defend myself they would despoil us; would abuse, torture and kill me and mine; and this seemed horrible to me. But all that troubled me before has now turned to joy, and confirmed the truth. I know that my enemies, the so-called evil people and robbers of the world –

are people, and are the 'human sons', like I am; they, like me, love goodness and hate evil; that they live, as I do, on the eve of death, and, like me, look for salvation and can only find it in the teaching of Christ. If they do any evil to me, it will be evil to them; therefore they have to do me good. If the truth is unknown to them, they can do evil, considering it good, but my knowing the truth makes it my duty to reveal it to those who do not know it. I cannot do so otherwise than by refusing to take any part in evil, and by professing the truth by my deeds.

You say if enemies, such as Germans, Turks, or savages, come to attack you, and if you do not make war, they will kill you all. This is an error. If there were a society of Christians who did no evil to anybody, and who gave the surplus of their labor to others, no enemies, either Germans, Turks, or savages, would torture or kill them. They would take what these Christians (for whom there would exist no difference between Germans, Turks, or savages) would give up to them. If Christians live in a non-Christian society that defends itself by war, and if a Christian is called upon to take part in war, that is the moment for him to testify the truth to those who do not know it. A Christian knows the truth only in order to testify of it before those who do not know it. The only way to testify of it for him is by his deeds. And his deeds are the renunciation of war and doing good to people without making a distinction between so-called enemies and his own.

"But if the family of a Christian is assaulted not by foreign enemies, but by their own evil people, if he does not defend himself, he and his family will be robbed, tortured, and killed." This is an error, again. If all the members of a family were Christians, and gave up their lives to the service of others, not one man would deprive them of food or kill those who can serve him. Mikluha Mackli settled among a most brutal tribe of savages; and not only they did not kill him, but they came to love him, submitted to him, - only because he was not afraid of them, did not demand anything from them, and did good to them.

If a Christian has to live amidst relations and friends who are not Christians in the full sense of the word, who defend themselves and their property by violence, and who call upon him to take part in their violence, then is the time for him to fulfill the duty for which life was given to him. The



knowledge of the truth is only given to a Christian in order that he should make it known to others, and especially to those he is more closely connected with, and to whom he is bound by ties of relationship or friendship; and the Christian can testify to the truth in no other way than by avoiding the errors into which others have fallen, and refusing to take part either in the violence of the aggressors or of those who resist them, by giving all up to others, and by showing that his only desire is to fulfill the will of God and that he fears nothing as much as acting against it.

“But the country cannot allow a member to evade fulfilling the duties incumbent on every citizen.” The government requires each man to take his oath of allegiance, to take part in judging and condemning; each man is obliged to enter the military service, and if he refuses he will be exposed to punishment, exile, imprisonment, and even execution. And here again this demand of the government will be for the Christian a call to fulfill his duty of life. The Christian knows that all the requirements by government are the demands of people who do not know the truth. And therefore the Christian, who does know the truth, must testify it to those who do not. The violence, imprisonment, perhaps even death, to which the Christian will then be exposed in consequence of his refusal, will enable him to testify to the truth, not in words, but in deeds. Every act of violence, pillage, execution, and war is the result, not of the irrational force of nature, but of people who are ignorant and deprived of the knowledge of the truth. And therefore, the greater the evil these people do to the Christian, the further they are from the truth, the more desperate they are, and the more necessary the knowledge of the truth is for them. And a Christian can only transmit the knowledge of the truth to others by keeping away from the error they are in, and by returning good for evil. The whole duty of a Christian, the whole purpose of his life, which cannot be destroyed by death, lies in this.

People, who are linked together by deception, form, we might say, a compact mass. In the compactness of this mass lies all the evil of the world. All the rational activity of humanity is directed toward breaking such link of deception.

All revolutions are efforts to break this compact mass by violence. People think that if they break this body apart, it will stop being the body, and they

keep hammering it; but in their efforts to break it apart they only forge it.

Yet, no matter how much they keep forging it, the connection of its component parts will not break until an inward power is transmitted to them that can force them asunder.

The power that chains them is 'falsehood,' 'deception.' The power that frees each link of the human chain is 'truth.' The truth is transmitted to people only by the deeds of the truth.

Only the deeds of the truth, which bring the light to each man's heart, can destroy the chain of deception and remove one man after another out of the compact mass fettered by deception.

And this has gone on for eighteen hundred years.

The work began when the commandments of Christ were first set before the world, and it will not end until all is fulfilled as Christ says (Matt. 5:18).

The Church, whose members tried to unite people by persuading them that it was necessary for salvation to blindly believe that the truth was in her, is no more. But the Church, whose followers are not united by promises of reward, but by good deeds, lives, and will live forever. That Church does not consist of people who cry 'Lord, Lord,' (Matt. 7:21-22) and live in sin, but of people who hear His words and follow His commandments.

Those who belong to that Church know that their lives will be blessed if they do not break the unity of the 'Human Son,' and that their happiness is undermined only by their not following the commandments of Christ. And therefore they follow them, and teach others to do the same.

It does not matter if these people are few in number or many. They are that Church which cannot be overcome by anything, and which all people will join, sooner or later.

'Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.' (Luke, 12:32)

THE END

Translated from Russian by Constantine Popoff

Transcribed and edited [www.nonresistance.org](http://www.nonresistance.org) 2005

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## Notes

[←1]

A town in the south of Russia where a dreadful railway catastrophe took place in 1883.

[←2]

These words have been incorrectly translated. The word ηλικια means age, time of life; therefore the expression signifies: 'you cannot add one hour to your life.'

[←3]

δοξα has been incorrectly translated by the word 'honor'; δοξα comes from δοχεω, and signifies opinion, teaching.

[←4]

Faith cannot proceed from trust in promises he might make.

[←5]

Χριστις signifies judgment and not condemnation, as it is sometimes translated.



[←6]

Luke 4:1-2. Christ is led into the wilderness by delusion, in order to be tempted there. Matt.4:3,5. Delusion says to Christ that he is not the Son of God if he cannot change stones into bread. Christ answers, 'I can live without bread; I live by what is breathed into me by God.' Then delusion says, 'If you are alive by what is breathed into you by God, cast yourself down from this height; you will kill your flesh, but the spirit breathed into you by God will not perish.' Christ answers, 'My life in the flesh is by the will of God. If I kill my flesh I act against the will of God – I tempt God.' Matt. 4:8-11. Then delusion says, 'If that is so, serve the flesh, as all men do, and the flesh shall reward you.' Christ answers, 'My life is in the spirit; but I cannot destroy the flesh, because the spirit is put into my flesh by the will of God. Therefore, while living in the flesh I serve God my Father.' And Christ returns from the wilderness into the world.

[←7]

The way we often hear parents try to justify such a state of things is really surprising. 'I want nothing for myself,' says a father; 'my life is a hard one; but I love my children, all I do is for them,' i.e., 'I know, by experience, that to live as I do is to suffer, and I therefore bring up my children to be as unhappy as I am. I love them, and therefore I make them live in a town full of physical and moral infection, give them into the hands of mercenary strangers, and both physically and morally spoil my children.' Thus do parents try to justify their own irrational lives.

[←8]

Those whom I considered better and nobler than me.